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By R. F. FOSTER

Author of "Foster's Complete Hoyle," "Auction Bridge," Etc.

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January, 1910

CAB NO. 44

CHAPTER I

LATE in the afternoon of a clear cold day in the Fall, the usual crowd of loungers was scattered through the brilliantly lighted marble corridor that formed the men's entrance to a hotel on upper Broadway, New York. The long rows of leather-covered easy-chairs with which the corridor was lined were filled with men in various attitudes of indolence. Some of the men were smoking dreamily, some were reading the afternoon papers, while others were chatting to friends or telling stories. None of them seemed to have anything in particular to do, although it might have appeared to an impartial observer that the business in which the occupants of all these chairs were engaged was the careful scrutiny of each person that passed along the corridor.

At the street end stood the colored porter, ready to swing the revolving door for any newcomer that might wish to enter, while the man

at the cigar counter, just inside, gazed absent-mindedly out of the window at the passing throng on ever-busy Broadway, the Great White Way.

At the other end of the corridor the clerk, standing behind the counter, which is called by courtesy a desk, seemed to be dividing his time between feeling for his scarf-pin, as if to be sure that it was still in place, and keeping his eye on the elevator boys, who were lolling lazily against the open doors of their cars.

A rather showily dressed man, apparently about fifty, clean shaven, with bushy eyebrows and thick lips, strolled up to the desk and helped himself to a match, with which he lit a cigar. Then he stuck his thumbs into the armholes of his fancy waistcoat, leaned his back against the edge of the desk and crossed his legs.

"Rotten cigar," he remarked to the clerk presently, taking it out of his mouth and looking at it critically.

"You're always kicking about something," retorted the clerk, with a smile that betokened old acquaintance. "Why don't you buy fifty-cent cigars? You can afford it."

Before they could continue the conversation, their attention was attracted by a tall young man, in evening clothes, who had just stepped

out of the elevator, where he hesitated for a moment, taking in his surroundings with a rapid survey. The clerk leaned over toward the man in the fancy waistcoat and whispered: "Just keep your eye on that for a moment and you'll see something."

As the subject of this observation came toward the desk he gave one the impression that he was a man about thirty, and there was something in his movements that suggested the strength and agility of athletic training. He looked down the corridor toward Broadway, and then turned round and went out at the ladies' entrance on the side street.

"Looks English by his clothes," remarked the man in the waistcoat, "but he isn't a blond. He's got about the blackest hair I've seen in some time, if it isn't dyed. I suppose it's still the fashion to wear the whole suit of hair over there, mustache, Vandyke and side whiskers, just because the king wears his that way." He stroked his own face carefully, as if to assure himself that he had none of the ornaments to which he referred.

"Never mind his whiskers," said the clerk in a low voice. "Just keep your eye on the Broadway door for a minute."

In less than a minute from the time the dark

young man with the Vandyke beard had disappeared through the ladies' entrance, he came into the hotel again by the Broadway door, walked quickly along the corridor, scanning the faces right and left out of the corner of his eye, until he had reached the ladies' entrance again. After a glance through the glass doors up and down the side street, he turned back and approached the desk.

Handing the clerk a card, he asked how he should reach the address upon it. The clerk had hardly taken the card when, to the Englishman's evident astonishment, the man who was leaning against the desk deliberately reached over and grasped it, holding his cigar in the same hand. Before the clerk had time to open his mouth, the smoker remarked, "Why, that's in Brooklyn," in pretty much the same tone that one would have said, "Why, you want to go to Africa." Handing back the card he went on glibly: "Better take a car to the City Hall, and then cross the Bridge. Columbia Heights is somewhere on the other side. Ask your way when you get across. I never was in Brooklyn, 'cept passing through it to get to Coney."

The Englishman bowed his thanks, drew on his gloves, buttoned his top coat, and walked briskly toward the revolving door, running the

gantlet of the loungers at each side, all of whom followed him with their eyes, twisting their necks slowly as he passed, just as they had twisted them fifty times before during the last half hour.

Arrived in Brooklyn, and having been put down at a dingy corner on the way up Fulton Street, with the direction to walk straight up the hill, the young man made his way through a street of curious old-fashioned houses, with somber brown-stone fronts and odd-looking wooden steps and handrails, which had been placed upon the stone steps, ready for the Winter's coming snow storms.

One of these was evidently the house for which he was looking, and after a careful scrutiny of the numbers, many of which were painted in white letters upon the faces of the brown-stone steps, he ran nimbly up to the door of a comfortable, roomy-looking mansion and rang the bell.

At an office in the city, the day before, he had presented a letter of introduction to Mr. Charles Ohlstrom, who had invited him to dinner. The letter was from Mr. Ohlstrom's brother, who lived in the Midlands. All it said was that Hardy Maxwell was a fine fellow, a native of Warwick, and that any attention to him during

his brief visit to the States would be a favor. It was this dinner engagement that Hardy Maxwell had come to keep.

Mr. Ohlstrom's daughter, Helen, had asked a few questions about the stranger who had brought the letter from her uncle, and she had come to the conclusion, from her father's reports, that he was just an ordinary young man, tall, and very dark for an Englishman.

"I don't suppose he is as attractive as Mr. Lathrop," remarked her mother, "but then those shocking men are always good-looking."

"Well, mother, you know I don't believe half the stories that are told about Mr. Lathrop. He always treated me with the greatest respect."

"There is no question about his having run away with another man's wife, is there?" the mother retorted testily.

"I have nothing to do with other men's wives," Helen answered. "I judge my friends by their conduct toward me."

"Well, we won't say anything more about it. You girls will excuse anything in a handsome man, but I trust that if you ever meet Mr. Lathrop again you will have nothing to do with him."

The girl shrugged her shoulders, and her mother went on:

"Mr. Maxwell may not be handsome, but as he comes with an introduction from your father's brother, he is probably a gentleman."

The girl gave another shrug of her pretty shoulders, as if to indicate that she did not care much about Maxwell's appearance. In fact, she had already formed a mental picture of some one tall and lank, with loose-fitting clothes, and a briar pipe in his mouth, but as all women like to please, even when they are not particularly interested, and as there always seems to be something more or less romantic to the average American young woman in the idea of meeting an Englishman, she took particular pains with her toilet when she dressed for dinner, and looked at herself in the mirror a great deal oftener than was necessary as the hour approached at which Mr. Maxwell was expected to present himself.

Helen Ohlstrom was tall and straight, with a slender but well-proportioned figure. She had a well-shaped head and a good, straight nose; a good width between the eyes; firm lips, and that absolute neatness in the arrangement of the hair which one somehow or other always associates with a woman of refinement. The hair itself was brown, and in a brilliant light one could distinguish that peculiar streak of lighter shade,

almost bronze, which is said to indicate the combination of the ardent lover and the steadfast friend.

Her father and mother were chatting with Maxwell when Helen entered the room. As the stranger stood up to be presented, the girl could not help mingling a glance of admiration with her smile of welcome. He was so different from the person she had pictured to herself; so tall and straight, with his black hair and beard in striking contrast to the snowy whiteness of his tie and waistcoat. As she put out her hand their eyes met, and she felt, somehow, that she had made a good impression. She was in evening dress, the modest, girlish cut of which disclosed a beautiful neck and arms that were round and white.

Helen sat opposite Maxwell at dinner, a circumstance which gave her an opportunity to make further mental notes concerning his appearance. Most of the men she knew were clean shaven, and while the black mustache and beard struck her as odd, they were becoming, and gave a certain virility to the face. As to the other features, she thought it would be difficult to pick out any that was striking or peculiar. When she looked at his eyes or his nose or his forehead, they appeared very much

like other men's. How characteristic the chin that was concealed by the Vandyke beard might be she could only guess. The whole expression of his face, while pleasing, especially when he talked, seemed devoid of any distinguishing trait. It was a face that one could not easily fix in the memory except for the mustache and the beard.

After dinner a married couple of mature age, friends of Mr. and Mrs. Ohlstrom, dropped in. The woman lost no time in stating the object of her visit, which was to play duplicate whist.

"Just a few boards," she insisted. "I am sure Mr. Maxwell won't mind. We can play twelve up and back. I am just dying to try that new plain-suit echo."

After profuse excuses to the young Englishman for what they assured him would be only a brief interruption, the four older persons sat down to their game, the visitors shuffling the cards and marking the trump slips with an energy which betrayed the ruling passion.

Helen led Maxwell to the other end of the drawing-room, where she played for him a little —disjointed bits of melody, interlarded with small talk, in which they mentioned the newest

books and the latest plays. At first there was a slight constraint, of which the girl was quickly conscious. Maxwell responded to all her conversational ventures without contributing any clue to his own personality. He told her absolutely nothing about himself, yet he looked at her with frank eyes, and when he smiled she saw something in his face which inspired absolute confidence—a fearlessness in which strength, tenderness and honesty appeared to be mingled. As he leaned against the piano looking down at her, she noticed that he had a repose of manner seldom possessed by her own countrymen. He stood so still and gazed at her so disconcertingly that she ended her playing rather abruptly with a crash of chords that was struck with the mischievous intention of startling him. He seemed to read her thought, for he smiled comprehendingly.

"That was the signal that I have reached the end of my international topics for drawing-room conversation," Helen announced, with an artless challenge in her tone. "Now it is your turn to talk, and mine to assent meekly to everything you say."

She chose a high-backed chair in front of the fire, which was burning merrily in the open grate,

and with a wave of her hand invited Maxwell to take a seat near her.

"If you will allow me to suggest it, I think the most interesting subject that you could discuss would be yourself," he said, resting his elbow on the arm of the chair and shading his eyes from the firelight, so that he could gaze at her when she least suspected that he was watching her. "You know I have heard so much about American girls and their individuality, so you will pardon me if I tell you that I am glad your stock of conventional small talk is exhausted."

Helen's face flushed as she answered in a bantering tone which thinly disguised her resentment:

"I decline to be studied as a type, even though I might furnish amusement for my father's guest. You disappoint me. I thought you might be different from the usual Englishman who analyzes us and puts a label on us to distinguish us from his sisters."

Maxwell made haste to apologize.

"I confess that I have labeled you," he added, "and I hope that I may know you well enough some day to explain just how I have classified you."

The girl's color deepened. Involuntarily she

raised her eyes to his. Although they looked at each other for a moment only, the glance established a subtle understanding.

Helen broke the awkwardness of the silence by some commonplace remark, and then the conversation drifted pleasantly until it carried them back to themselves. Gradually Helen told Maxwell many things about her life, so smooth and so uneventful that she was often restless because of its monotony. She confessed that now and then she longed for something that would disturb the course of her well-ordered social existence. Her father and mother, who belonged in thought and sympathy to their own generation, and not to hers, were over-indulgent, she admitted, but they held her closely to their own small circle of friends, and they did not seem to realize that she was a woman of progressive ideas and independent character.

"You do not look at all strong-minded," remarked Maxwell, with a glance that took account of the tenderness and sweetness indicated by the rounding of the chin and the curve of the lips.

"Indeed, I am not strong-minded, and do not want to be," she hastened to say. "And I cannot imagine why some people insist that I am stubborn, unless it is because I stick up for my

friends when I hear any one running them down."

"Perhaps what they call stubbornness is really firmness," Maxwell urged. "I think that firmness in loyalty to one's friends is a very desirable quality. If that is what your people find fault with, I trust that I may some day be one of those on whose account your firmness will be manifested."

Although she turned the subject at once, she did not seem displeased, and after that they chatted for an hour or so, gradually paying less and less attention to what they said. There is something in the mere physical presence of young persons that seems to fill them with a sense of happiness and content, regardless of what they talk about. Probably that is why, when they get older, they wonder what they found to say to each other in all those hours that they passed together.

As Helen, nestling into the comfortable old arm-chair, sat there, looking sometimes into the fire and sometimes at her companion, the flickering light from the grate set her off to advantage. Maxwell, it must be confessed, looked at her a good deal more than at the fire, his glance sometimes following the outline of her arms, sometimes lingering upon the contour of her

face, the curve of her neck and the slant of her shoulders, and then falling to the taper fingers that were idly toying with the tassel on the arm of her chair.

It was ten o'clock before the twelve boards had been played "up and back," and the visitors had acknowledged defeat by eight tricks. Maxwell rose to go when the card-players took their departure, his adieux being smothered by an altercation between the whist-players about the play of the king of clubs on board five, which had cost two tricks.

The door had scarcely closed behind Maxwell when Helen Ohlstrom turned to her mother to remark enthusiastically that she thought he was "*awfully* nice." And then she took a long look at herself in the hall mirror, and wondered what impression she had made upon him. "I do hope he will come again," she added to her mother. "You know I always thought Englishmen were conceited, and that they did not pay much attention to girls; but he is certainly very agreeable."

"I thought he was rather quiet at the table," remarked Mrs. Ohlstrom. "He smiles responsively when you speak to him, and he listens very attentively; but I like people that talk a little more. Those Englishmen all travel a

good deal, and he must have seen a lot of things to talk about. What is he doing over here, I wonder? Your uncle did not say."

"I'm sure I don't know. I didn't ask him."

"Didn't he say anything about himself or his friends, or what he hoped to do here?"

Helen shook her head dreamily. She was thinking of the way in which he had looked at her, and of how well he seemed to understand her. There was something in his manner that was sympathetic, but she had to confess aloud that she had done most of the talking herself, and had told him "lots of things" without getting any information in return. "I hate men that are always talking about themselves, anyway," she declared defensively when she saw a puzzled look on her mother's face.

Before Mrs. Ohlstrom could reply her husband joined them again, after a visit to the library to get a cigar.

"That Maxwell seems a very decent sort of fellow," he observed. "We must have him up again. I suppose you asked him to call?" He smiled at Helen as he asked her mother the question.

"What is his business over here?" demanded Mrs. Ohlstrom. Her husband stopped to think

as he puffed at his cigar. Then he had to confess:

"I don't know exactly. Fact is, I didn't ask him. Seems queer kind of chap in some things. After dinner I tried to draw him out a bit while I finished my cigar. Spoke to him about Bill Whittridge and Tom Richardson; but he didn't seem to know either of them. Funny, too, they are such close friends of Uncle Charlie's, you know. He talks like a man that had something on his mind." Seeing the look of inquiry on his wife's face, he added hastily: "Oh, well, it's all right. I have Charlie's word for him. Besides, I think I know a man when I see one. I have rather taken a fancy to Maxwell. Perhaps I'm prejudiced in his favor because I'm English myself."

Mr. Ohlstrom, stout, bald-headed and good-natured, dismissed the subject with a whiff of his cigar and Helen kissed him good-night.

CHAPTER II

RETURNING to the hotel, and finding it only eleven o'clock, Maxwell strolled into the billiard room to watch the players for awhile. The way in which his face expressed his opinion of the various shots showed that he was familiar with the principles of the game, however strange the appearance and proportions of the balls and table might be.

He had not been sitting there more than a few minutes when the man with the loud waistcoat, who had directed him to Brooklyn earlier in the evening, strolled into the room, and immediately came over to where he was sitting.

"Got there all right, I hope?"

Maxwell smiled assent. The man's tone was friendly without being unpleasantly familiar. It had that peculiar American touch of sympathetic interest which is distinguishable from idle curiosity.

"Play billiards?" he asked presently, dropping into the next seat. The question naturally led to a discussion about the difference between the American and the English games, and finally,

to the suggestion that the Englishman should try his hand, they got a table. In spite of his better knowledge of the carom game, the elder man soon found that he was no match for his younger opponent. After being beaten by about fifteen points in fifty, he proposed that they should adjourn for a drink.

Sitting at a table in the café, he ordered two "horse's necks," insisting that the Englishman should try that concoction, and emphasizing the fact that it was much better than a Mamie Taylor. After having drained his glass to the toast, "Here's how," he became confidential, and in the course of the few minutes that they sat there he told his young companion all about his business, his prospects, his wife and family, his likes and dislikes in literature and the drama, science and sport, and also his preferences in politics. If his account of himself were true, he had prospered in this world, and justified his own opinion of himself when he declared that he was of "some account" now. The only thing that he forgot to mention was his name. He did not seem at all curious about his companion's affairs, but was evidently highly pleased at having found so good a listener.

Upon their return to the billiard room every table was engaged. Without a moment's hesi-

tation the older man called a boy to bring his coat and call a cab. "Let us go up to the club," he said. "We can get all the tables we want there, and I'll introduce you to a few more American drinks."

The club to which they drove had a rather pretentious entrance and brilliantly lighted reception rooms, with a certain air about it which suggested a hotel, and which would have told an experienced clubman that it was one of those associations whose membership is too large to be select, yet not always large enough to pay expenses.

"Let me see, I forget your name," the older man remarked, as if he had known Hardy Maxwell for a week, but had let his name slip from his memory for the moment.

The younger man hesitated for an instant, and then said quietly, "Milton Fletcher," with a slight bow.

The name was scribbled on the register as a servant took Fletcher's coat, and the two men went at once to the billiard room.

They had played only a few minutes when an elderly man, who was puffing a fat cigar, approached the table. He was at once greeted effusively by Maxwell's sponsor, who said:

"Hullo, Phillips! Shake hands with Mr.

Fletcher. Phillips, old boy, Mr. Fletcher is a visitor from England, and he can do you up at this game with his left hand."

After that, it seemed impossible for any one to come within ten feet of the billiard table without being introduced. The Englishman put a good face on the matter, and managed to say something each time in reply to the eternal question, "What do you think of America?" or, "How do you like this country?" Considering that he had been in the country just three days, the opinions that he expressed were certainly flattering, even if they were based almost entirely upon the results of a visit to Brooklyn.

Tiring of the billiards, the two men went into the café, and there more promiscuous introductions took place. Every one had to shake hands with Fletcher. Most of the men seemed quite pleased to meet a friend of "Charlie," which was the only name the man with the loud waistcoat was addressed by in that gathering. The clubmen who were introduced to Fletcher evidently liked his looks. A tall, well set-up young fellow in faultless evening dress has a great deal in his favor in any company.

Among the men who were thus presented to the young Englishman was a Mr. Paul Maynard, a tall, fine-looking man with a gray

mustache, a large nose, and a prominent chin. Maynard was rather thin for his height, and had a peculiar nervous little laugh, which, however, went very well with his soft voice and his gentle manners. He insisted on a drink, which they had hardly swallowed when some one challenged "Charlie" to another game of billiards. "Charlie" jumped up at once, excusing himself with the remark:

"You know I'm a fiend at that game. Back presently. Take care of Mr. Fletcher for me, Maynard."

As soon as "Charlie" was gone, Maynard asked his new acquaintance if he would not like to see the building, and they went through it. Maynard was pleased to find that Fletcher appreciated what he saw. "You are the first Englishman that I have taken over this house," he said, "that did not confine his remarks to saying we kept the place too beastly hot, or that there was not enough ventilation." Then he laughed, that little nervous laugh of his, and proposed a return to the company in the café.

The men there talked about various things, mostly business and politics, with an occasional dash of sports. Maynard noticed that Fletcher seemed to be better as a listener than as a talker. He also observed that while the others were

very free in their expressions of opinions, Fletcher preferred to agree rather than discuss. When some man, with great vehemence, would give the others the benefit of his ideas, Maynard would catch Fletcher's eyes quietly fixed on the speaker with a peculiar searching look, and a smile which seemed to conceal itself.

Occasionally some one would put to Fletcher a direct question that would have brought from an American an illustration drawn from his own experience; but the Englishman did not touch upon his own affairs. Not once did he refer to anything that had ever happened to him personally, or to any acquaintance that he might have had, or to any place that he had ever been. The skill with which he avoided such things appeared to Maynard as remarkable. He knew that Englishmen seldom discussed their private affairs, even with their friends, never with strangers. But such Englishmen as he had met were always full of anecdote and reminiscence, especially if any reference were made to places and things "at home."

The others did not notice the Englishman's reticence so much, probably because they were not paying the same close and interested attention that Maynard gave him. Maynard had a keen judgment of men, and he soon realized

that the young man before him was a person of much more than average intelligence. But there was something about him that suggested, he could not tell just why, the mysterious, the uncanny. Maynard thought that his face, at certain unguarded moments, indicated secretiveness, if not actual cunning; and Maynard saw, under the black mustache, the outline of the firm lips, and under the pointed beard the contour of the square, determined chin.

They say that love at first sight is a common thing between the sexes. One will sometimes find, even in the midst of the most prosaic surroundings, a peculiar attraction between persons of the same sex, and especially between men of unusual intellectual power. They will pick each other out of a crowd on board a ship, or a company in a club, as unerringly as a squirrel will pick out a tree that will furnish it with food, no matter how many others may be in the woods.

Fletcher had fascinated Mr. Paul Maynard.

CHAPTER III

HELEN OHLSTROM was not disappointed. Maxwell not only paid his dinner call, but he called once or twice afterward, and he made himself particularly agreeable to all the members of the family. Helen felt, as she had never felt with any other man, that this Englishman understood her, that he sympathized with her, and she caught herself telling him things that she had never spoken of to any other person in the world; not even to her old school-girl friend, Madge, who had shared so many of her confidences, especially about men.

Maxwell had known Helen for several weeks, and their acquaintance had advanced far enough for her to go out for a walk with him occasionally, when one Sunday afternoon she asked him if he would not like to go on an exploring expedition to Coney Island. Finding him quite willing, she went to get her hat and furs. As they left her home she informed him that winter was the best time to see Coney.

At Coney Island Maxwell did not care to look at the tawdry plaster fronts of the build-

ings, although he admitted that they might be very pretty when they were all lit up. The business part of the island is not attractive in winter, and the girl and her companion made their way along the sand toward Brighton and Manhattan, intending to cross the old wooden bridge at Sheepshead Bay and to ride home from there.

It was a lovely day. One of those clear cold days that give to the American fall the most attractive climate in the world while it lasts. There were many persons upon the beach and along the roads, although the closely nailed-up hotels were pictures of desolation where, only a few weeks before, all had been music, and flowers, and dining out of doors. The boardwalks, parts of which had been removed in preparation for the onslaught of the waves from the winter storms, were not inviting for pedestrians, but all was well in the world so far as the girl and the young Englishman were concerned. Many eyes watched them admiringly as they strode rapidly along. Once fairly out upon the sands, beyond where the Brighton Hotel has been dragged back six hundred feet to save it from the sea, the winds from the ocean seemed to affect the girl with something of their own free and careless spirit, and she laughed with a

childish abandonment to the pleasure of the moment.

"Isn't this a delightful playday?" she exclaimed, taking a full deep breath.

"Are you enjoying it, even with such a dull playfellow?" Maxwell inquired, suddenly realizing that he had been so preoccupied by his own thoughts that he had said very little.

"Yes, I am having a very good time," she answered. "But now that I think of it, I ought to be quite on my dignity because you find so little to say to me."

He did not reply for a moment. He looked at her intently and the smile he gave her, accompanied by a slight closing of the eyes and a loosening of the lips, might mean anything. Somehow it checked her buoyancy until he spoke.

"I supposed," he said, "that we had become the sort of friends that understand each other without the formality of speech, which conceals so much more than it reveals, after all."

Helen shook her head, smiling the while.

"Of course you can read my thoughts, for I am about as transparent and shallow as the edge of a wave, but I confess I cannot understand you. Many times when I think I am beginning

to know you it seems as if you shut the door of your real self."

Maxwell stopped to pick up a shell, and both of them stood still for a moment, close to the sea. He turned to her and said slowly and gravely:

"I have never shut the door of my heart to you, Miss Ohlstrom."

When she heard the words, uttered with evident purpose, Helen trembled with the realization of a strange happiness. She knew that she ought to rebuke this man, who was little more than an acquaintance, for daring to speak to her in such a manner, yet she could not believe that he was taking advantage of the liberty accorded to American girls. She tried to summon the same feeling of resentment that he had awakened on the evening of their first meeting. She really meant to reprove him, but despite a new sensation of timidity she looked into his face, and what she saw there was so convincing that she could only drop her eyes to hide their tell-tale acknowledgment of her trust in him.

A few moments later and they were walking on together with the cool sea breeze blowing in their faces. It was not until half an hour later, when they were chatting about some trivial

thing, that the girl suddenly became uncomfortably conscious that she had let this Englishman assume the position of a possible suitor.

Helen Ohlstrom had studied Maxwell closely. She had watched the curious smile that had attracted Maynard's attention, and it always recalled her father's remark, "Queer chap in some things." She realized that she knew nothing of his business in America, or the probable duration of his stay. He seemed to have few friends in New York. Perhaps that was the real reason why he devoted so much of his time to her. Her reflections were suddenly interrupted by Maxwell's saying:

"I attended a dinner rather unexpectedly last evening in a restaurant and had rather a curious experience."

"Tell me about it," Helen replied rather absent-mindedly.

"I do not exactly know how to tell you," Maxwell began hesitatingly, "but perhaps you will forgive me for describing the row, as I thought it very amusing. You see, it was Mr. Maynard who got me into it."

"Oh! I hope *you* did not get into a row in a public restaurant!"

"Oh, no! It was not the row he got me into; but the dinner, you know. I was playing bil-

liards with him at the club—you know he put me up for two weeks—when some one rang him up on the 'phone and asked him to fill out a little dinner party. When he told them he had me on his hands, they said to bring me along."

"But from what you have told me, Mr. Maynard and his friends should be nice people. How did they get you into a row?" Helen questioned with concern.

"None better. You see, I never saw Maynard before I got into conversation with a man while we were watching a game of billiards at the hotel one evening," Maxwell answered. "You Americans seem to make acquaintances so freely! After we had played a game together we talked awhile over one of those queer drinks with outlandish names. Then he wanted another game, but we could not get a table, so he took me up to his club, and there he introduced me to everybody, right and left. I never dreamed of such promiscuous introductions as you make in America without asking the consent of either party. Among the men I met that evening was Mr. Maynard; but to save my life I am not able to recall the name of the man that took me to the club, except that his first name was Charlie."

"How funny!"

"Yes. I must look up the register some day and find out who he was."

"Well, go on with your story," the girl urged.

"I am coming to that now. I stayed there pretty late that night and Mr. Maynard, who seemed a good sort, asked me to dine with him there some evening, and then he put me up for two weeks. When that time is up he says he will get me put up at another club, and then at another, as long as I stay. Really, it is a charming country! One could not get into clubs as easily as that in England, you know."

"But what about the dinner? These preliminaries are very interesting, but I want to know about the trouble they had."

Maxwell hesitated.

"Just fancy a man telling a girl what I have begun to tell you, all about a jolly row," he said. "Really I must not."

"Really you must," Helen insisted. "I want to know what sort of Americans you are meeting. Besides, you have aroused my curiosity." She smiled at him; but a moment later her face became serious and she watched him furtively.

"Well," he went on, "the dinner was in a private room and there were only five of us. The host was a Dr. Ramie, but the most interesting man to me was a Mr. George Hartley."

"You don't mean the president of the Hardware Trust, or something of that kind?" Helen interrupted; "I think my father knew him in a business way."

"I believe Mr. Hartley has something to do with trusts. And there was a Mr. Frank Douglas, a very——"

"Why, you don't mean the Wall Street Douglas, that the papers say has been coining money lately?"

"Probably. I didn't ask particulars; but neither of them seemed to think much of twenty thousand dollars. Mr. Maynard, you see, is a retired broker, and is still, I gather, the leading authority on the correctness of the form of bonds, or something of that kind. That is how he comes to know all these rich men, I suppose.

"Well, Dr. Ramie met us in the hall. It seems that he did not know that Mr. Douglas had trimmed Mr. Hartley pretty severely in the stock market not long before, or he would not have invited them together. Two or three others were to have been there from Baltimore, but they missed their train or something. The moment Hartley arrived and found Douglas there he wanted to go home again, and it was to save his dinner party that the doctor rang up Maynard. He asked us to sandwich ourselves

between the two at table, and to obviate, as much as possible, any necessity for their speaking to each other."

"What a congenial party!"

"Yes, wasn't it? The doctor's plan was all right during the dinner itself, but after the coffee and cigars came in the conversation became more general, and it soon became very evident that these two were not inclined to endorse each other's opinions on any subject under the sun. Candidly, I think that Mr. Hartley had had about as much champagne as was good for him."

"Isn't it dreadful how men drink when they get together?"

"Well, the rest of us were all perfectly sober. At least I am sure I was," Maxwell smiled quietly.

"But how did they get into a fight if you were all sober?"

"There was no fight. It was only a row. All talk and bluster, and offers to bet thousands of dollars on any absurd proposition that might be made."

"How lovely! And you enjoy that kind of thing better than calling on me?" she asked lightly. "I had a feeling that you would come to Brooklyn last evening."

"It is hardly fair to put it that way; but to be brutally frank, I enjoyed it last night immensely. It was so American and so enlightening."

"And I suppose I am not American and—enlightening?" She was going to say "interesting" at first. She tossed her head and looked across the bay at the distant outlines of Sandy Hook, while he hastened to say:

"Yes, you are enlightening—very! But I thought you wanted to hear the story?" he returned with a look that told her she was altogether charming.

"I do," she declared, turning away to hide the answering blush.

"To cut it short, the row came to a head when they got to talking about the failure of Mulberry Street to find Bradley the murderer."

"Mulberry Street? What is that?"

"I mean the police, of course. We always speak of Scotland Yard doing such things, you know; so I naturally thought of Mulberry Street over here, don't you know." He stopped short after this explanation, as if he had been rather confused by the question.

"And how did your friends propose to find Bradley?"

"Oh, they had no proposal to make on that

subject; but Mr. Hartley, who was getting more hilarious every minute, talked boastingly about 'the finest police force in the world.' He said it was only a question of days until they would find the fugitive, and all that sort of thing, don't you know, while Mr. Douglas pooh-poohed the whole thing, and said that if the police were left to themselves they could not catch anybody."

"But are they not always left to themselves? Who helps them?" Helen demanded.

"Why, my dear girl—I beg pardon, Miss Ohlstrom—why, I mean—you see—Scotland Yard—no, I mean the police depend more upon their previous acquaintance with crooks and upon a knowledge of their ways and haunts than upon simple detective skill. The police are not so clever—smart, I think you call it—as people think they are." Maxwell smiled with an expression in his eyes that had a meaning she could not comprehend, and that peculiar, cunning look which she did not exactly like came over his face.

"If the police had nothing to guide them but the place that was robbed," he went on, "very few thieves would ever be caught. They recognize in the manner in which the house is entered, in the careful way the shades are pinned up, instead of being rolled, or something like

that, that the job is the work of a certain man. Then they locate the man they suspect, and try to find out where he was that night and what he has been doing since. In this, other thieves often furnish valuable assistance and information; sometimes to avoid trouble for themselves in minor cases. That is where your common criminal is a fool. He should work alone," and again the same smile stole over his face.

"And do murderers get caught because the police recognize their special style of work?" asked Helen, laughing at the droll idea.

"Not exactly," he admitted with a smile. "When a man is murdered the police try to pick out the person who is most likely to have committed the crime. They look for a motive, and from the motive they reason out the man, and then they watch him, and question all his friends, especially if he has a sweetheart. It is his friends that usually betray him. Many a man has been hung by his sweetheart."

The girl shuddered and involuntarily drew her furs closer around her. "We have wandered a long way from the dinner," she remarked.

"So we have," he agreed. "Well, let us finish it up. Douglas insisted that the police could never catch a thief unless he were a well-known criminal," he went on. "Members of newly

formed gangs, he said, were hard to trac
cited cases of the sons of respectable p
who had committed one burglary after a
without even being suspected, until the
accidentally caught in the act, or the p
was traced to them. Hartley laughed a
and said the police could catch any thief i
days if they were in earnest about it
Douglas maintained that if an absolute
known criminal, a newcomer in the wo
crime, were to commit a robbery withou
ing to take into his confidence any accom
there would be absolutely no possibility of
ing him except by tracing the stolen goo

"That made Hartley positively abusive
talked of betting unheard-of amounts o
skill of the police. Finally Douglas to
his note-book and offered to make a s
bet of ten thousand dollars that if the
any way in which Mr. Hartley could a
to have a robbery committed by an am
so that the amateur should have twelve
start of the police, they could not catch hi
month, to say nothing of three days
Ramie, the host, seemed to think that Mr.
las was about right, and offered to bet a hu
the same way."

"And I suppose you wanted to bet too

but you men are dreadful when you get by yourselves, drinking and gambling and betting on things," exclaimed Helen.

"Indeed, I should not have tried to tell this. I had no idea it would sound so bad," Maxwell cried. "Forgive me! I don't see why I ever referred to the incident, yet something has compelled me to confide in you. Something tells me it may be of interest to you some day. Sometimes you seem more like a boy comrade than a girl."

"Don't interrupt yourself," Helen commanded firmly. "I can listen, even though I confess to a feeling of—of truly feminine revulsion."

She trusted him, she told herself, yet not an hour after that self-revelation on the sands she was made keenly conscious of the mystery of personality which so often disturbed her. The door of his heart might be open to her, but the way to the door was a labyrinth.

"I confess I should have backed Douglas myself; but there was no actual bet made," Maxwell went on. "They simply agreed to think it over for a week, probably to let Mr. Hartley cool off a bit. We broke up with the understanding that we should meet there again next Saturday, and that if any one had anything prac-

tical to suggest that would settle the bet, each of them would put up ten thousand on the result."

"And you are going to be a party to such a gambling transaction? And bet on robbers being too clever for the police?" Helen demanded with severe accusation in her voice. Why, robbers sometimes kill people when they are resisted, don't they? Why did you let yourself be drawn into such things?"

"Really, I think it is extremely interesting, all the more so because it is between those two. I am quite sure, if I am any judge of human nature, that the police would not lack assistance, financial and otherwise, if Mr. Hartley had ten thousand at stake and Mr. Douglas was the prospective loser. I fancy a trial of that kind would be as exciting as a horse race. I should certainly put a bit on myself."

She turned the conversation to other matters, and they soon found themselves at the bridge over Sheepshead Bay. The dinner story was still running through her head, but she made no comment upon it until they were nearly home.

"I don't know what to think of you," she said suddenly with assumed carelessness, "but I suppose I shall ask you in to tea. Perhaps I

can get back my first good impression of you before you return to the city; but not a word before papa and mamma about that horrid betting and robbery business."

CHAPTER IV

IN telling Helen Ohlstrom the story of his first meeting with Maynard, there was one little detail that Maxwell did not mention. This was that in introducing himself to the stranger in the billiard room at the hotel the name that had been given was Milton Fletcher; not Hardy Maxwell. By that name, as we have seen, he had been introduced to every one at the club. By that name he was known to Paul Maynard and to all Maynard's friends.

Another trifle that he had overlooked in the narrative was that he had changed his hotel next day, and had registered as Milton Fletcher at the new one, so that when Maynard called for him or rang him up, it was Mr. Fletcher that was asked for and that responded, just as it was Mr. Milton Fletcher that was at the dinner.

A day or two after the "row" that had been described to Helen, Maynard called for Fletcher at his hotel, and together they went up to the club to dine. Of course the chief topic of conversation between them was the tilt between

Hartley and Douglas, which Maynard seemed to regard as a huge joke.

"Ten thousand dollars seemed to be a mere bagatelle to them," remarked Fletcher thoughtfully. "I have heard about large wagers on the other side, you know, and I believe that it is true that some very large bets are occasionally made; but to be brought face to face with twenty-thousand-dollar bets in this way is rather a new sensation, I confess."

"Ten thousand, my dear fellow! Why, Hartley must have an income of nearly half a million, and as for Douglas, he is a plunger in everything. But, I say! Wasn't Hartley full, and didn't they go for each other? And did you ever hear of such ridiculous propositions as they made? To get some one to rob a bank—wasn't it?—and then run away and hide and see if the police could catch him!"

Paul Maynard slapped his leg and laughed aloud at the very recollection of it.

"I took it that Douglas was quite in earnest——"

"Oh, so he was, my dear fellow! Quite! When Douglas takes out that note-book of his and puts down a transaction involving cash, it stands; as you would find out if you told him you would be willing to pay a hundred and

twelve for Canadian Express stock, as I did once. I got the stock next day at noon."

"And I also took it," continued Fletcher, as if not noticing the interruption, "that Mr. Hartley would spend as much again to help the police if he were betting on them. Money is a powerful aid in such matters; it enables one to cover so much ground at once. That is why private detectives fail. They cannot afford to put a hundred men on the job at once. Many a man has escaped because his pursuers had not money enough to follow up all the clues, and then a reward is such a powerful inducement to an officer to concentrate his efforts and let less important things slide."

"I did not think of that, the whole thing being a joke. But of course you are quite right. I see you are a good judge of human nature; at least with regard to Hartley," Maynard added musingly. "He is one of the kind that doesn't let anything stand in his way when the dollars are at stake. But here we are at the club."

Just as they reached the top step the sound of a cab door slamming made them turn round.

"By Jove! Here's Douglas himself," said Maynard, holding open the door for him.

"You fellows here?" remarked Douglas, nod-

ding to each in turn. "Dining, I suppose? Sorry I can't join you, but I have a private dinner upstairs."

"Awfully sorry, old chap," Maynard answered. "We were just talking about that joke of yours with Hartley, you know, when you offered to bet him a million."

"Joke nothing!" blurted Douglas as he stepped into the elevator, slipping his coat check into his pocket. "You are coming up to Green's Saturday night, are you not? And your friend? Let me see; I forget the name. Oh, yes; Mr. Fletcher. I shall have something to propose on Saturday that will make old Hartley think twice about backing the omnipotence of the police force of this town"; and he waved his hand to them through the elevator door as he went up.

"By Jove! I believe he is really in earnest," said Maynard with a laugh as he and Fletcher strolled toward the dining-room.

After they were comfortably seated and had ordered their cocktails and scanned the menu critically, Fletcher reverted to the subject which was evidently uppermost in his mind.

"Yes, I think Douglas is quite in earnest, and what is more, I think I could help him a

bit, don't you know, with a suggestion or two. Were you ever hunted?"

The suddenness of the question made Maynard turn red in the face. Seeing his embarrassment, Fletcher hastened to put the idea he had in his mind in another way.

"Did you ever shoot without a dog?"

"Why, no. I'm not fond of hunting."

"I don't mean hunting. I mean birds."

"Well, we call that hunting in this country, you know; because the birds are so scarce that we have to hunt for them. But what has that to do with Douglas?"

"I should judge that the hunt he proposes would be quite as exciting and even more full of surprises than shooting without a dog."

"But you don't for a moment suppose that such a thing as that will ever be attempted?"

"Such a thing as what? As settling that wager? Why, yes. I rather hope it will. At least, if a practical scheme could be found for the test, don't you know."

"Really! You amuse me. What singular ideas of sport you Englishmen have, to be sure. Of course, as you say, it would be exciting if one could see anything of the chase. But simply to know that a bank had been robbed and to wait for the robber to be caught does not strike

me as particularly exciting. All you could do would be to read the paper every morning, and then you might miss the item." Maynard paused a moment as if pondering over something.

"You asked me a very curious question just now," he went on, "so I will tell you a little story. It's not a secret, as I have told it several times lately. I knew a young man that was held up by three ruffians when he was on his way to see a girl that lived out in the suburbs of a certain town, and he shot one of them plumb in the breast with a forty-five Colt's. The fellow drew up his right leg—sure sign that he was shot through the heart—and staggered backward about twenty feet before he fell. Everybody else ran away. Well, the young man read the morning papers behind locked doors for three weeks after that, so that no one should see him start and tremble or turn pale when he came across the announcement of the finding of the body.

"Every policeman he met fascinated him. One day, turning round after a look in a shop window, he saw a policeman looking at him from across the street. He stood stock-still until the officer came over to him and asked if

he wanted anything. That woke him up and he gradually got over it."

"And what about the man he shot?"

"Never heard a word of it from that day to this, although it is twenty years and more now. I suppose there is no harm in finishing the story. It was I that shot him. That is why I was rather astonished when you asked me if I was ever hunted."

"Oh!" said Fletcher, half to himself, as if suddenly enlightened about something.

The conversation turned to other subjects, and after the dinner had passed off very pleasantly the two men went into the billiard room for their usual game together. About eleven o'clock, as they sat down in the café for a night-cap, Douglas stepped out of the elevator and waved his hand to them.

"Don't forget Saturday," he called out.

"Wait a minute, old chap. Come over here," Maynard called in return, and as Douglas joined them and accepted the invitation to a drink, Maynard added quizzically: "Do you really mean that you are in earnest about that bet with Hartley?"

"Never more in my life."

"Did you ever!" laughed Maynard. "Upon my soul, but I believe you mean it."

"If you will allow me," interrupted Fletcher, "I think I can suggest a plan by which the matter might be settled to the satisfaction of those betting on it. That is, of course, if you have not already settled on a plan of your own."

"You are the very man we are looking for," said Douglas promptly. "I have thought of several schemes, but the hitch is a man to carry them through. The executive end is always the hitch, you know. I know hundreds of men with the gray matter in their brains full of money-making projects; but there is not enough red blood in their hearts to carry them out."

"You refer, of course, to the difficulty of finding an amateur criminal that would consent to be hunted. What would you be willing to pay a good man?" Fletcher inquired.

"If he succeeded, any part of the ten thousand or all of it. I never split hairs in such matters. I would sooner spend ten thousand more than have Hartley beat me out."

"That is a very liberal proposition, Mr. Douglas," remarked Fletcher slowly, rubbing his hands. "On Saturday you shall not only have the scheme, but the man to carry it through, provided my plan meets with your approval."

Both men looked at Fletcher in astonishment

as he rose from his seat, wished them good-night, and left the café.

"That fellow is the real thing," remarked Douglas, draining his glass. "I could use him in my business."

CHAPTER V

THE next afternoon, when Hardy Maxwell called on Helen Ohlstrom for what had now become an almost daily walk, it was evident to her that there was something on his mind. Even while he talked to her he was apparently turning over in his thoughts something quite foreign to the subject in hand.

She knew he was fond of long walks, and she had planned a little excursion for that afternoon. It was up through the woods to the north of the city, where the late October foliage was now at its best, and where the views of the Hudson added both life and peace to the scene. It was one of those exhilarating days that make one feel good to be alive, and every fiber in her body seemed to respond to nature's mood.

She tried to express this feeling to Maxwell, but could elicit nothing from him in return. Piqued for the moment, she became silent herself. Maxwell, apparently becoming suddenly conscious of their mutual silence and perhaps realizing that it was his fault, turned to her and said quietly: "Forgive me; but nature

seems to have a very different effect upon me from that which it has upon you. At least that is so to-day."

"So you did hear what I said, then?" she answered.

"Oh, yes. I heard you."

"Well, let us talk about something. I never saw you in such a poky mood before," she said, smiling at him archly. "Suppose you tell me what you think about America by this time. Let us see. How long have you been here? Several weeks now?"

"America is certainly a great country," he said musingly, as if the subject appealed to him. "Every one seems to get on. I have heard of several good openings for a man with a little capital, but not so many for simple ability, unless you call fifteen dollars a week an opportunity. As a starter in life in New York I would take ten thousand dollars capital in preference to the undiscovered or still untried abilities of an Edison. When you say to a man, 'I could be very useful to you in your business if you gave me a chance,' he listens as if you were telling him that you would reform if it were no longer necessary to steal, or as if you were talking about the possibility of selling goods in Mars; but when you say you are look-

ing for a chance to invest a little capital, he is all attention in a moment."

"Don't you think ability will get the capital some day if the man is the right sort?" As Helen asked the question she turned and looked him full in the face. It was a look that would have encouraged any young man. She was wondering to herself if it was the want of capital that was worrying him.

"Oh, I suppose so," he answered, smiling back at her. "You American girls seem to know how to spur men on to all kinds of efforts. It reminds me of the knights of old, none of whom ever seemed able to do anything worth while unless some woman tied a favor to spear or shield." He hesitated a moment. Then he said with much seriousness: "Do you know that I believe I could accomplish almost anything in this country if I might wear your favor?"

"Surely, I shall never find a knight more mysterious," she answered, with a smile. "In the tourneys I believe it was the masked prince who always won the favors of the fairest ladies."

"Yes," he agreed. "The unknown horseman who had ridden from a far country entered the lists with his visor down and was always the victor. At least, that is the way things went

in the romances I used to read when I was a boy. The lady of his heart recognized him as her true knight even before she saw his face, and"—he smiled teasingly—"she trusted him absolutely."

"But sometimes she was in doubt," Helen urged. "She had to battle with misgivings and false reports which tried her constancy."

Helen spoke in an even tone, but avoided looking at him, so that he might not judge how much she meant him to accept as personal.

"Could you not trust a knight who is not a prince, but simply a soldier of fortune?" he asked.

"Even if he kept his visor down?" she questioned.

She laughed at her own sally, and they walked on for quite a distance without speaking. As she swung along the country road, her cheeks aglow with the fresh air and exercise, she made a charming picture which attracted many a sidelong glance from her companion. At a place where a stone wall, covered with a tangle of brown vines, invited them to stop for a few moments to enjoy the view of the autumn world, Maxwell assisted Helen to a seat. Standing before her he said:

"I must beg your pardon for presuming to

hope that you might let me be your knight. I might have known that some real prince already wears your colors and holds the pledge of your constancy."

His serious manner and his searching glance were such that she could not deceive him, even though she might have liked to make him suffer a little from the same uncertainty that vexed her when she thought of him.

"Neither prince nor knight has the right to wear token of mine," she declared truthfully, looking away from him.

"Then give me the right," he pleaded.

"That would mean that I must have too much faith in you," Helen declared, shaking her head. "If I once committed myself to any knight I should have to believe in him absolutely, even though all sorts of misgivings came to me. Remember that you shook my confidence in you when you told me that dinner story."

She retained the bantering tone, although she knew he had already won something more than faith and friendship.

"If I could find a lady who would remain unmoved by appearances or by ill report," he said, "if I could win her while I still wore my visor

down, I think I could perform deeds well worthy of the cause."

"Why, you are talking in exact story-book style. I can almost imagine that your walking stick is a lance." The girl laughed as she slid from the wall and untied a bunch of violets that she wore at her belt, bound with a purple ribbon. Hastily disengaging the flowers, she tied the ribbon to the handle of his stick with mock solemnity.

"Now you have committed yourself," Maxwell asserted. "I am not a knight who can permit any lady to laugh at him. I accept your token, and shall hold you to the pledge it signifies."

"It is all a jest," Helen hastened to say, feeling strangely uncomfortable. "I forgot that I was talking to an Englishman who does not understand our American humor."

She assumed her most dignified manner as they turned back toward the city.

"Did you mean what you said about believing in a person, even though all sorts of bad reports might be brought to you?" Maxwell inquired after they had been silent a long time.

"I was referring to an imaginary knight," Helen answered, with her chin in the air.

"Let us take the case of a person not im-

aginary. If a man won your friendship, would you be able to keep your faith in his integrity, even though you might hear rumors that were derogatory?"

Again she felt that he was hiding something. She was suddenly afraid of him, for she felt that he had gained a subtle mastery over her. She would have liked to snatch the purple ribbon from his walking stick, but he was wary and kept it well out of reach. As she did not answer his questions, he answered them himself.

"You are like every one else, I see, very modest about your own good qualities, unconscious of them perhaps. I knew the first time I ever saw you that you were not the kind of girl to be changed by anything others might say after you had once made up your mind. If I once gained your confidence, if by some miracle I could win your trust, nothing but my own actions would ever alter you. Am I not right?"

"Oh, I suppose so," she said lightly. "I have had some very good men friends. Somehow, I am very lucky that way. Every man I have known has been nice and true and straight."

"Indeed! You are very fortunate. Few girls as attractive as you are escape the attention of a few black sheep."

"I never knew any one who could tell the mut-

ton of a black sheep from the mutton of a white one. I suppose it is the same way with people. Beneath the surface there is not much difference; but I hate those people that are always ready to believe anything bad they may hear about their friends, and there is nothing makes me so mad as to have them repeat it at every opportunity before they are sure it is true—or even then."

"But it is because they think it is true that they believe it to be their duty to warn you against the black sheep," he urged, smiling at her earnestness.

"Yes. Some men have a nasty habit of warning girls against their men friends. Black sheep don't bite any more than white ones. It is the dogs that are supposed to take care of the sheep that bite, and it is usually the white sheep that get bitten. Whenever a person tells me something nasty about a mutual friend, I always think of the way they will probably talk about me some day."

"Then you admit that I estimated your character aright?" he said, smiling at her admiringly.

"I told you once before that I was very transparent and shallow," she answered, without looking at him. "But we have been talking like two silly children." The seriousness

of his manner disturbed her somehow. With a woman's intuition she understood that he had the power to make her suffer. It was all very well to amuse herself with a handsome Englishman, but had she not been rather reckless of consequences? Had she not presumed on the fact that her parents had received Hardy Maxwell into the family almost on the footing of a relative? It was as if he were at least the cousin who had sent him to them. Her father and mother had always guarded her with old-fashioned vigilance, and she had enjoyed the unwonted freedom of the last few weeks. She realized that she could not tell them just how far her acquaintance with Hardy Maxwell had progressed. With a flush of shame she remembered how she had urged him to refrain from mentioning the dinner story and the betting incidents connected with it which had shocked her so much.

A few minutes later and they were back in the Brooklyn drawing-room, where they found Mr. and Mrs. Ohlstrom awaiting them with the sort of impatience that comes of a delay of the dinner hour.

CHAPTER VI

SATURDAY night came, and the others were at Green's on time; but Hartley did not appear. The proprietor was very attentive, as usual, and assured them that he would see to it himself that the dinner should not spoil while they were trying to locate Mr. Hartley by telephoning to various places. He asked Fletcher how the American restaurants pleased him, and bowed at the compliment he drew forth, afterward paying particular attention to the young Englishman.

When Hartley was finally reached at one of his clubs, he seemed to be quite taken by surprise at the announcement that Mr. Frank Douglas was on hand with a proposition that would settle that little bet. Dr. Ramie was at the telephone.

"Why, you don't mean that Douglas was in earnest about any such absurd proposition as that?" came from the other end.

"He certainly was. You know he booked the bet at the time, on condition that some scheme to decide it should be forthcoming by

to-night. Well, he is here with his scheme and his check. I am to be the stakeholder."

"But, my dear fellow, you must be all crazy. Why, the whole thing was just a little after-dinner argument."

"I hardly think you can say that, Mr. Hartley. You made the proposition yourself. At least, you were the one that offered to back the police for any amount. When Mr. Douglas said he would take you on for ten thousand, you seemed only too willing, so he booked the bet. I believe the first idea was that you were to suggest a test; but Douglas and Fletcher seem to have saved you that trouble, and——"

"Fletcher? Who's Fletcher?"

The doctor explained, adding: "We are all here waiting for you to hear the scheme and put up your money."

"You don't mean it? Why, it's the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of. Nothing but after-dinner talk, my dear fellow, I assure you."

"Then you have lost faith in the police, and want to back out?" Dr. Ramie said this with a wink to himself.

"Back out! In a bet with Douglas? Never! Not on your life! Say, I cannot possibly get away from this crowd before eleven. Eat your

dinner and go to the show or something, and I'll meet you later, anywhere you say."

"Why, it's after eight now. We'll stay here. Get here as soon as you can."

"All right. But say: not a word to them about any backing out. You understand? All right. Good-by."

There was not much trouble in passing the time until Hartley arrived, which was soon after ten. The dinner had occupied more than an hour, and when the cigars and coffee were brought in the members of the little party had settled themselves down to an intimate talk.

As Maynard poured out the coffee he brought into full view a ring that he wore on his right hand.

"Rather a peculiar ring that, if you will pardon me for calling attention to it," observed Douglas. "I never noticed it before. Did not know you wore a ring."

"Yes, it is odd," said Maynard, taking off the ring and showing it. "The design is a small round tablet, you see, with a drudenfuss cut lightly upon it. Looks as if it had been scratched by hand almost. From under one end peeps a snake's head, and from the other a fish's. Funny you did not notice it before," he added with his usual nervous little laugh. "I

believe a drudenfuss keeps out confusion and trouble if you make it yourself; but I did not make this one."

"Family heirloom, I suppose?" remarked Fletcher.

"No, it was given to me." Maynard put the ring back upon his finger as he spoke. "I believe it has quite a history. If I were superstitious I would not have accepted it, as it has been associated with two violent deaths."

When Hartley arrived they got down at once to the business of the evening. It appeared that Maynard and Dr. Ramie had been over the ground with Milton Fletcher in advance, and were quite familiar with the scheme proposed. The doctor was full of the business involved, and seemed to attach most importance to the proper understanding of the conditions and to the posting of the bet. Maynard, on the other hand, was full of the joke, as he persisted in calling it.

Douglas did not waste any time in laying before them the plan that he had elaborated, which was that one of them should place a certain amount of money in a safe somewhere, and that they should hire some man to steal it. After this man had had sufficient time to get

away they could go to the police and raise the hue and cry after him.

This plan was speedily demolished by Fletcher, who pointed out its great weakness, which was that the whole party would inevitably be drawn into the police net as witnesses, and would have to betray the quarry themselves.

Maynard, Hartley and Dr. Ramie were evidently pleased by the businesslike way in which Fletcher presented his reasons for disagreeing with Douglas. Douglas himself was so strongly impressed by the young Englishman's acumen and foresight that during a pause in the conversation he asked Fletcher if he would not like to go into a broker's office.

"Of course I don't want to inquire into your affairs, Mr. Fletcher," he remarked, "but unless I am much mistaken there is a good deal more 'do' than 'blow' about you. There are great openings in this country for young men that can keep their mouths shut until they have thought over what should be said, or until what is to do is done. I could put you into a place where a small partnership might grow into something worth while."

"I don't know anything about stocks," replied Fletcher, with a smile that showed he was not displeased at the compliment. "I have a

pretty good berth now. At the same time, I am seriously thinking about making my home in the States, if I can find an opening. It is very good of you to suggest the possibility as to my future, but for the present I think it will be better to finish the matter in hand."

"Let us have your idea of what might be done, then," demanded the doctor.

"My plan is briefly this," said Fletcher: "There are two or three conditions which limit the problem and increase its difficulties. In the first place, in case the amateur criminal is caught, it will be necessary that there should be some loophole provided for his escape. It might be shown that the whole thing was a mistake, and that no actual robbery had occurred. Otherwise, if the robbery were real, the whole lot of us might go to jail as accessories before the fact.

"Another point is that it will be necessary to commit the robbery without having to commit burglary or assault on the person as well. You might announce that nothing had been actually stolen, after all; but you could not deny that a house had been broken into. If it were highway robbery, the person who was held up could hardly claim, after the thief was caught, that it was all a mistake, and that no one had ever attacked him.

"Any such things as robbery of the mails, or of an express company, would never do; because they would not be humbugged by any story of 'nothing in it' after they had caught the thief, but would probably dig out the whole story on the witness stand.

"As one of the conditions of the bet is that the police should not be able to identify the criminal by his work, nor be led to him by his pals—a very important condition, by the way—it will be necessary for the identity of the thief to be a mystery from the first. This will compel the police to find out who he is before proceeding to the second part of their task, his arrest. I should insist on the importance of providing against the possibility of the man's own friends, or supposed friends, betraying him to the police. In cases of robbery the difficulty is always to know who did it. If you read the papers you must have observed that. But in murders the difficulty is to find the man after his identity is clearly established."

"My, but there's a lot to think of!" remarked the doctor.

"What I propose is this," continued Fletcher. "Some one having about his person valuable jewels or a large sum of money should go to a certain hotel. Money would be better, if the

sum were large enough to interest the police in the case. That the victim had this money about him should be possible of proof by his having drawn it, received it, or taken it out of a safe in the presence of witnesses just before going to the hotel.

"The robbery should take place in this hotel, and it should be done without having to break any locks or climb through any windows. Probably a very simple way would be to suppose that the money had been placed in a pocket-book and put in the inside pocket of a coat; whereas it had actually been placed in the pocket of an overcoat. This overcoat could be carelessly thrown on the bed or a chair upon the guest's arrival at the hotel. Thinking the money was in his coat pocket, the guest could mention to the clerk at the desk that he had a large sum of money to put in the safe in a few minutes; but wanted to get some papers out of his bag as soon as it was sent upstairs, or something of that sort.

"A call to the telephone, or a momentary absence from the room for any purpose, would give the desired opportunity for the abstraction of the pocket-book. Some twenty minutes later, when the guest discovered that the pocket-book was not in his coat, he would rush to his over-

coat. The next thing would be the alarm, and after that, the thirty days' hunt would be on."

Hartley had listened up to this point with the greatest attention; but he could not help interposing a question.

"But if the man who is robbed could call witnesses to prove that he had the money on his person when he entered the hotel, how could he claim it was all a mistake if the thief was caught with the pocket-book on him?"

"The thief is not to keep the pocket-book. The mistake could be explained by the discovery that the victim had put it in his overcoat pocket before leaving home, thinking it was in his inside coat. In the haste of leaving home he had put on another overcoat at the last minute, leaving the pocket-book hanging in the other coat."

"And how do you purpose getting the pocket-book back into the other coat at home?"

"The man that does the robbery is to bring the pocket-book here, as evidence that the crime has been committed. It is to be handed to Dr. Ramie, who will see that it finds its way back to the coat that has been left behind. The man is to have twenty minutes clear start after he gives up the pocket-book."

"I should not fancy leaving a pocket-book

full of money hanging up in the hall for a month," remarked Hartley, with a laugh.

"It will be in a clothes-closet in an apartment, and the closet will be locked. This time of year it is not unusual for a man to fancy he will need a warmer overcoat before going out."

"They might say he dropped the pocket-book between the house and the hotel."

"He is to take a cab from place to place. And he will tell the cabman to wait for him, as he is going out again as soon as he gets his valuables in the safe. The cab will still be waiting in front of the hotel when the alarm is given, so that it may be searched for the money."

"Scheme's all right but for one thing," remarked Douglas. "Where are you going to get a man to be robbed and a man to rob him?"

"That has also been provided for," declared Fletcher quietly.

"You bet it has," put in the doctor, with a laugh. "That's the principal part of it."

"And who is your man? Or is that a secret?"

"I understand," said Fletcher quietly, "that Mr. Douglas is willing to pay handsomely for his share of the expense, in case the man succeeds in eluding the police for a month. I suppose that if he is caught, and Mr. Hartley wins, he will stand the expense?" Mr. Hartley

nodded. "Suppose we say that if the man succeeds he shall get half the money. That will be five thousand?"

"He can have the whole ten, as far as I am concerned," said Douglas promptly.

"Same here," said Hartley, not to be outdone in generosity. "I don't want the money. But it's a cinch. The police would ferret that out in thirty hours."

"Then, gentlemen," continued Fletcher, the curious cunning look that Helen Ohlstrom did not like coming into his face, "if it is agreeable to Mr. Hartley to give the doctor his check to cover the one already deposited by Mr. Douglas, the robbery will take place on Thursday night, at the Earlswood Hotel. We selected that because it has two entrances, or rather two exits."

"And the actors in this little comedy?" asked Hartley, taking out his note-book and jotting down the name of the hotel; "I suppose that is a secret."

Fletcher shrugged his shoulders and glanced at the doctor. Maynard smiled and nodded as if consenting to something. Fletcher looked Hartley full in the face and said slowly:

"Mr. Maynard has kindly consented to be robbed, and I will do the trick myself."

George Hartley's face was a study. Douglas laughed. Dr. Ramie, quite unmoved, relieved the strain by reminding Hartley to send down that check in the morning.

"Nice exhibition you will make of yourself if you are caught!" was the first thing Hartley said, his tone being quite serious.

"Not at all, sir. I am a foreigner," Fletcher replied. "Practically no one here knows me. I shall go to another hotel and change my name before Thursday, probably to-morrow or next day. If they catch me, it will be James Walton's name that will go on the blotter until such time as Mr. Maynard gets home and finds the pocket-book in his overcoat. But I assure you I cannot imagine what clue the police will begin upon. They will not even have a chance to inquire about men who have more money to spend than usual, because the pocket-book will be given up at once. I have so little fear of being caught that if I had the money I should put a pony on myself."

"I have a hundred with you, you know, Hartley," put in the doctor. Mr. Hartley nodded. Then turning to Fletcher, Hartley said:

"I think you have enough on now. Ten thousand if you succeed. Don't be greedy. But let me understand this clearly now," taking out

his note-book again. "Thirty days is the limit. If you succeed you get ten thousand dollars. Mighty good pay that. If you fail you get nothing; therefore I shall get the whole stakes if I win. Is that right?"

"Perfectly," said Fletcher quickly, with a smile.

"Not a bit of it," interrupted Douglas. "You said you would give up your end of it if you won, Hartley."

"No. You misunderstood me. I said that if I were taking your end I would. It may be all right to pay a man for succeeding; but not for failure."

Douglas pursed his lips with an expression of contempt; but Fletcher did not object. Hartley went on, still scribbling in his note-book:

"And it is next Thursday night you are going to tee up?"

"That is the day we fixed on," said Fletcher; "and we made the hour late enough to prevent its getting into the morning papers. I shall expect you gentlemen to be here at one o'clock in the morning. That will interfere with no other engagements. I shall present myself with the pocket-book as soon after one o'clock as I can. You are then to remain in this room twenty minutes, in order to give me time to get clear away."

"And don't forget, gentlemen," said the doctor, "that we are all to meet here thirty days from next Thursday night, which will be Saturday, at eight o'clock sharp, for the paying over of the stakes. If you are not here I shall pocket the money myself."

"And if the jig is up before thirty days?" asked Hartley, still scribbling.

"Meet here and settle up thirty days from Thursday, win or lose," said the doctor positively. "That is the condition to which you will please sign your names here."

Douglas stood up, stretched himself, and laughed. Hartley seemed still to be only half convinced that the whole thing was not a joke of some kind. Maynard was full of animation, and he slapped Fletcher on the back as he exclaimed:

"By Jove! old fellow, I believe you are right. This is going to be more fun than hunting without a dog!"

They all turned to go. Hartley whispered to Fletcher: "And what hotel will you stop at under the name of James Walton?"

"I have arranged to go to the Realton," replied Fletcher quietly. And then once more he smiled that same cunning smile as he saw Hartley jot down the name in his note-book

CHAPTER VII

ON Wednesday evening Hardy Maxwell dined at the Ohlstroms' home. Always quiet in company, he showed even less than his usual animation during the dinner. Helen thought that she detected the symptoms of the same preoccupied manner that had annoyed her at the beginning of their long afternoon walk.

Hardy made no attempt to lead the conversation. What little he had to say was addressed chiefly to Mr. Ohlstrom. Helen, finding herself almost ignored, devoted her attention to her mother, who was too much concerned with the arrangements of the dinner to notice her guest's manner.

Helen wondered what could make Maxwell so reserved. In some things, she had to admit to herself, he was certainly peculiar. When she had asked him about a certain play that she had seen, it was evident that he had not been inside a theater since he landed. He spoke once of wishing that he could go to some indoor athletic meeting, but he did not explain what prevented him from attending it. The more she thought

over their acquaintance, the more she was impressed by a certain air of mystery about him; something that she had not yet penetrated; something, she almost feared to confess to herself, that did not ring quite true. He had the power to assume an air of absolute detachment; he had the habit of shutting himself behind an impenetrable wall of polite impersonality.

After dinner, seated in front of a cozy open fire in the parlor, he relapsed into a sort of semi-inattention that was particularly annoying to her just then.

"A penny for your thoughts," she said suddenly, after several attempts to interest him in something.

"Do I appear to be thinking about something besides you?" he asked, with a smile.

"Well! I should say that if your thoughts were on a girl at all, she must be a long way from here."

"Perhaps I was thinking about a girl who is here now being a long way from here," and he looked at her quizzically, while she began to wonder just what he meant, and what was coming next.

"I suppose you have heard of g[illegible]veling long distances to get married," [illegible]on.

"What do you think of the scheme?" He spoke very slowly and deliberately.

"Why, really," she said with a little gasp, "I can't say that I have. I should not care for it myself."

"But suppose the man could not come to you, on account of his business, or something of that kind?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I should want to be very sure of the man before taking such a step, and very much in love with him. But I don't think I should care for it. In fact, I know I shouldn't. But I shall never be called on to make such a decision, so what does it matter?"

"Then you would be willing to give him up rather than travel to a foreign country to marry him, if he could not come to you?"

"Really, Mr. Maxwell, I don't see the use of discussing such things. People don't get engaged by correspondence. If they have been together long enough to love each other, why not get married before they allow oceans to separate them? But there! Let's talk about something else."

"But suppose that the man's circumstances were such that he could not marry at that par-

ticular time, and that he knew he could not come back?"

She felt that he was looking at her intently, and she was also conscious that he was leaning forward toward her in his chair. Somehow she felt uneasy.

"Please let us talk about something else. I am not good on problems of that kind. They are too suggestive of something irregular in a person's life." She noticed that he winced a little when she said that, so she hastened to add:

"It seems to me that the bridegroom should always come to claim his bride. The idea of a girl's crawling off to a foreign country to stand up and get married before a lot of total strangers! Not a soul around into whose arms she could throw herself and have a good cry, if she felt like it."

"Then I understand," he said slowly, drawing his chair still nearer, "that it would be useless for a man to propose to you unless he could come to your own home to marry you?"

There was something in his movement toward her, and in the earnestness of his voice, that almost frightened her. At the same time it fascinated her.

"Really," she stammered, "I don't understand you."

"Yes, you do, Helen!" She drew in her under lip convulsively on hearing herself called by her first name, and felt a little shiver as he touched her left hand lightly with his right. Somehow she felt that the safest thing she could do would be to stand up; but she found he still held her hand as he stood up, facing her, and looking fixedly at her face.

"That is your condition, is it? That you will never give yourself to a man that cannot come for his bride?"

"That would depend on the man, after all, I suppose," she faltered, and the words astonished her as they came. But when she realized what they meant she felt a feeling of relief and looked up at him with a smile.

"And if I were the man that asked you?" he whispered tenderly, putting his arm round her waist and drawing her to him.

She looked him straight in the eyes for a moment, and then she unconsciously laid her disengaged hand on his shoulder.

"You would come for me, I know, if it was in heaven or earth. But if not," sinking her head upon his shoulder as she felt his lips touch her cheek, "I suppose I would go to you."

The last words sank into a whisper so low that he could hardly hear them. One linger-

ing embrace, and then she started from him with a little fluttering laugh, and ran upstairs, kissing her hand to him for good-night. Safely in her room, she threw herself on the bed and buried her face in her hands, listening for him to go out. And then, far into the night, the burning flame of a fierce faith in her lover struggled against the chilling influence of an indefinable something that suggested doubt and fear.

CHAPTER VIII

THURSDAY night was very cold. Mr. James Walton stepped out of the Realton with the collar of his top coat well turned up and his hands in his pockets. He did not carry a cane in America.

As he passed the row of cabs standing near the hotel his interest in them was sufficiently evident to induce several of the drivers to make a jump for their vehicles and touch their hats. But he passed on without even shaking his head in answer to their eager "Cab, sir?"

A few blocks away he came to another cab-stand, and reviewed it with the same apparent interest and with about the same result. Still further away he came to another, and in this manner he visited a number of cab-ranks in front of stations and hotels, as if he were on a tour of inspection of that particular industry.

Finally he stopped abruptly in front of a particular cab and looked the driver over carefully. Evidently satisfied with the review, which the good-natured Irishman took in good part, he opened the door himself and got in. He told the driver to take him to a certain corner

uptown. Arrived at the street, he put his head out and ordered the driver to turn to the left and to go slowly. He seemed to be looking for a particular number, but when the driver asked him what number he wanted he did not answer.

Presently he called to the cabman to stop. On getting out he mounted the steps of a house a few doors further on and rang the bell. Just as he passed inside he called to the cabman to stay where he was for a few minutes. The house was Dr. Ramie's office.

Half an hour passed. Walton came to the door and found the cabman slapping his arms to keep himself warm.

"I am very sorry to keep you waiting so long," Walton said, "but the doctor is not in yet. They expect him every minute." Then he went down a few steps, and looked up and down the street, as if expecting to see the doctor coming along.

He went into the house again. Another half hour passed, but the doctor did not arrive.

The second time Walton appeared at the door he again apologized for the delay and asked the driver if he were not getting cold.

"You're right it's cold it is, sir, and seeming like snow the night."

"Won't your horse stand a minute while you come in and get a snifter to keep you warm?"

Cabby evidently needed no second invitation. After a quick hitch at the horse's blanket and a look at the lamps, he was up the steps beside Mr. James Walton, who still had the collar of his top coat turned well up, and who stood so that the driver could not very well read the name at the side of the door.

The two men passed at once into the doctor's office at the rear, where the physician's assistant was arranging some books. A decanter and glasses were already on the table, from which cabby inferred that his fare had already fortified himself against the chilly atmosphere.

After a good stiff drink cabby was persuaded to take a cigar, the doctor's assistant holding the match for him. Then another drink was in order, and about fifteen minutes had passed without seeming to be more than five. After a few minutes more he proposed that they should take one more drink, and then have a look up and down the street. Cabby, nothing loath, helped himself to a good four fingers of whisky, and then the two men went to the door together, opened it, and stepped out into the night air.

The cab was gone.

After the first exclamations of surprise from

Walton and appropriate explosions of blasphemy from the cabman, the two men walked to the corner together, on the chance that they might find some one who had seen which way the cab went. At that hour, and on such a cold night, there were few persons about. None of them had noticed any cab.

Retracing their steps, they went to the other end of the block on which the doctor's office stood. There they found a policeman, who said no cab had passed him; but he had only just come round the corner himself.

After a brief consultation, the policeman suggested that the cabman should go into the saloon on the corner below, and telephone to his employers at the stable, as the horse had probably started for home. While both men were sure the horse would be stopped, they agreed that the stable should be notified. Walton then said that he would walk back to the doctor's office and wait there; but that cabby need not come for him. Pulling out a five-dollar bill, he handed it to the cab-driver, and said he was sorry, but hoped the cab would be found all right again. Then he gave the police officer a cigar, and after more regrets for the unfortunate occurrence, he turned back toward the doctor's office and disappeared round the corner.

CHAPTER IX

ABOUT twelve o'clock that night Maynard drove up to the Realton, and told his cabman to wait for him a few minutes.

"All right, sir," said the porter, coming through the glass door into the cold air. He was a new hand, and anxious to please. "You don't need any check, sir. The cab will wait for you on the outside line, just across the street, sir."

Passing the office, Maynard stepped up to the information counter and asked that his card be sent up to Mr. James Walton immediately. The boy took the card and was entering the call on the stub when Maynard heard some one pronounce his name. Turning round, he found himself facing the manager, who knew him as a frequent diner at the hotel, and who now extended his hand. The manager's greeting was not as warm as usual, Maynard thought. In fact, he looked worried.

"You will pardon me, Mr. Maynard, I know; but may I ask you to step into my office a moment before you send that card up?" Then,

turning to the boy, the manager said sharply: "Just hold that call for a few minutes until this gentleman is ready." At the same time he took the card from the boy and motioned to Maynard to follow him into his private office. Once inside, the manager closed the door carefully, and waved his hand to a chair, taking one himself.

"You will pardon my apparent abruptness, Mr. Maynard," he said, "but I know I can trust you. I am sure I can also depend on you to tell me the truth. What I want to impress upon you is that I am disobeying orders in speaking about this matter at all."

"But, my dear fellow, what are you talking about? What is the matter?"

"The matter is this Mr. James Walton, to whom you were about to send a card. I had just relieved our house detective, whom I set to watch every one that called on this Mr. Walton. And here you are the very first person that seems to know him."

"But, my dear fellow——"

"I am sorry, Mr. Maynard," the manager went on, "that you should be the first person we could lay our hands upon in this connection; but, in justice to yourself, I think it is just as

well to clear it up through you as through any one else."

"But, my dear fellow, I don't understand what you are driving at, I assure you," protested Maynard.

"Well, that is what I supposed. In fact, I was sure your acquaintance with Mr. Walton must be either trivial or accidental. If you will allow me, I will explain matters as briefly as I can. If you can enlighten us in any way, I shall be very glad; because I am very much worried about the matter. Particularly since you seem to be mixed up in it."

"Mixed up! But, my dear fellow, I am not mixed up in anything. What on earth do you mean?" Mr. Maynard was beginning to think that the little joke which he was to be a part of that night had somehow leaked out.

"Well, not to detain you longer than necessary, Mr. Maynard, this is the state of the case. A Pinkerton officer—at least I suppose he is from Pinkerton's, they mostly are—followed this Mr. James Walton from the last hotel at which he stayed, at which, it appears, he was registered as Mr. Milton Fletcher." Maynard winced, and wondered how the police could have found out about their little plot so far ahead of its being carried out. "I suppose

you know," the manager went on, "that we watch everybody about a hotel like this pretty closely, and the head porter has a specially keen eye for baggage, and also for cabs." Mr. Maynard gave quite a start at this last statement; but the manager did not seem to observe it. "Now," the hotel man continued, "this Milton Fletcher came from another hotel to the one which he left to come here; and his name was neither Fletcher nor Walton at the first one, but Stewart."

"You astonish me," gasped Maynard, now beginning to feel a little nervous. The change of name from Fletcher to Walton he understood; but that Fletcher was also an assumed name came in the nature of a shock. He did not quite know what to say, or what it was that the manager expected him to say. "Did he leave those hotels without paying his bills, then, or what is the matter?" Maynard asked.

"On the contrary, he is most prompt. He owes nothing at the hotel he left, and I have just asked at the cashier's office here, and find he has paid up his bill for a week in advance. There is, I am sorry to say, a little circumstance in connection with the payment which we shall come to presently.

"Not a bad check, I hope, or anything of that kind. Because, you know, I would——"

"Oh, no! That is, not exactly. It is nothing that you could set right. Have a little patience, and let me tell you the important part of the story. The Pinkertons seem to have had instructions simply to identify their man, and to establish the fact that he is the same man that was known as Fletcher at the other hotel. I think they were rather astonished themselves to find traces further back still. They had three men here to walk through and 'mug' Mr. Walton, as they call it, so that any one of the three would know him again anywhere. We usually extend any little courtesy to the Pinkertons, thinking we might want it returned some day, so Mr. Jacobs, our house detective, gave the other officer a chance to look into Mr. Walton's room, without making any attempt to search it, you understand, but just to see what baggage he had, and if there were any initials upon it.

"Now, to go back a little, I want to call your attention to something that was in the papers a few weeks ago, but which may have escaped you. In fact, I didn't remember it until this Pinkerton man called my attention to it this evening. You know there was a big forgery of

English bank notes, supposed to be the work of a gang headed by a man named Ardmore."

"Oh, yes, I recollect it perfectly. It was said the gang came over here, I believe," assented Maynard, and the manager continued:

"From what this Pinkerton man tells me, the members of the gang are supposed to have been a little too quick for the police on the other side and to have landed here all safe and separated. Now he is very anxious that I should not breathe a word of what he suspects to a soul, and above all not to our own man Jacobs. That is why I am disobeying orders in telling you; but I trust you will not repeat it." Maynard hastened to assure him that he would be as silent as the grave, so the manager went on: "This Ardmore came to this country with a companion. They occupied the same room on the steamer, at least that is what the police have dug up by following a baggage clue. The London police did not know he was on board that steamer until she had docked here, it seems, although they knew that Ardmore at least would try to get here.

"Now, it is a curious thing that neither of the two men that were in that stateroom made any attempt to clear any baggage. The customs officers cannot find any declaration of

theirs. Yet the bedroom steward was certain that each of them had a valise, and that one of these bags was evidently made to order. As I understand this Pinkerton man, it was peculiar enough to make it pretty sure that there was no other like it. The London police sent a full description of it here by wire, so that Ardmore might be identified by it, as they had no other clue."

The hotel manager paused, and looked at Mr. Maynard with his eyes half shut. Then he continued with marked deliberation and emphasis:

"Well, Mr. Maynard, that bag is in Mr. James Walton's room."

"Great heavens! But you must be mistaken! Why, Fletcher is the dearest chap! You *must* be mistaken!"

"Possibly. But you will pardon me for having brought you in here to ask you just one question. How long have you known Mr. Walton, or Mr. Fletcher, or Stewart, or whatever his name is, and who introduced him?"

"Why, I met him at the club. Let me see." As his memory ran back rapidly over the past week or two, Maynard felt dazed. Could it be possible? Who was it that had brought Fletcher to the club in the first place? He could

not remember anything clearly for a minute. The manager's statements had quite unnerved him. All he could think of to say was, "So you think that Fletcher is this forger Ardmore?"

"Not Ardmore himself, but one of the gang. He does not answer the description of Ardmore, but he fits the steward's description of the man in the cabin with Ardmore absolutely. The Pinkerton man had it all pat. The bag seems to me conclusive. This detective is very anxious that I should not tell Jacobs or the regular police of his suspicions, as he says that would spoil it all. It appears that they never arrest counterfeiters. All they do is to shadow them in order to find out whom they connect with. That is why I want to impress on you not to mention the matter to any one until they have ferreted out the whole gang. Then, it appears, they will pinch the lot. If they thought I had said a word to you, and they found out that you were a friend of Walton's, they would blame me for spoiling the work of weeks."

"Then you are not going to arrest Fletcher?"

"You will pardon me, Mr. Maynard; but I see you are more accustomed to calling him Fletcher than Walton. Of course if you knew him at the other hotel, it was as Fletcher. I suppose you do not care to say why he called

himself Walton when he came to this house, or Stewart at another house, and why you sent your card to Mr. Walton?"

This question brought Maynard back to a vivid recollection of the business upon which he and Fletcher were engaged that evening, and which he now saw was apparently completely knocked on the head. He stammered something about Fletcher's having asked him to call him Walton just for a few days, and supposed it was a practical joke of some kind. He tried to force a laugh, but in reality he felt very uncomfortable. Finally, in order to escape, if possible, having to answer that awkward question about where he had met Fletcher, he blurted out:

"So you are not going to arrest him?"

"Not until they have traced all his connections. They hope to be able to locate the whole gang, and perhaps the plates. When the steamer gets back they will have that steward up here to identify him on the quiet, I believe. But the great thing is to trace up his pals, and here the very first person we run across is you! I am very glad it was I and not Jacobs that saw you hand in that card; because while Jacobs does not know what we suspect, he knows Mr. Walton is watched, and he is sharp enough to know that he is a crook of some kind. He would

have been watching you next. If you have no objection, Mr. Maynard, I think it would relieve matters a good deal if you would tell me how long you have known this fellow and who introduced you. But if you have any objection to stating the facts, of course I will not press the matter. You spoke of a practical joke of some kind. I would advise you to cut it out, Mr. Maynard, and at the same time, I trust you will pardon me for trespassing upon your time."

"To tell you the truth, I would rather not answer that question until I have a talk to my lawyer about it," was all Maynard could say. "What do you want me to do now?"

"Oh, nothing! In fact, I am almost sorry that I spoke to you about the matter at all; but I should be very sorry to see one of my patrons caught in the police net with such a dangerous person as one of the Ardmore gang. I am certain, Mr. Maynard, that unless you are very sure of the grounds of your acquaintance, you have been grossly deceived in continuing it, even if you did meet him at a club."

"But Fletcher is the dearest chap, I tell you. I can't think of the slightest thing wrong about him. He seems to be, in every respect, a gentleman and such a charming fellow, don't you know. You certainly must be mistaken."

"Oh, he is a charming fellow, no doubt. In fact, that is one of the things that confirms our belief that he is one of the gang. It appears that one of them makes a specialty of getting letters to some nice girl—forged letters, of course—and then making hot love to her and, if possible, inducing her to run away with him. Once she finds herself in a foreign country, dependent on him for money, he supplies her with these forged bank notes, and she passes them off with great success, because she never dreams that they are not genuine. He takes the change, and the gang gets it."

"But surely you don't mean to say that Fletcher has been doing anything of that kind here? Why, he has never even mentioned the name of a woman to me."

"Indeed!" The manager shook his head and smiled. "I don't like to undeceive you, Mr. Maynard; but your friend Mr. Walton, or Fletcher, or Stewart, or whatever his name is, was followed yesterday, and was seen to connect with a very stunning-looking girl, whose name and address the Pinkerton man secured, and who will be carefully watched from now on. They go out together a good deal."

"Why, you astonish me!"

"There are several astonishing things in this

connection. You were asking me about his paying his bills. When he paid his bill here he gave us an English bank note, for which he received considerable change. We do not ask people to write their names on the back of these notes as they do in English hotels; but we found three such notes in the cash drawer that evening, two of them from the restaurant. We cannot tell which one he gave us, but on submitting them to an English broker that rooms here, we found one of them was a forgery. The broker said, the moment he saw it, that judging from the descriptions it looked like an Ardmore note."

"Great heavens! I can't believe it! you know."

"But that is not all, Mr. Maynard. You must remember that I am telling you all this in confidence. I promised not to say a word. The fact is that this friend of yours is evidently an old hand, because when he goes out in the evening he always loses his shadow when he wants to. There were four men on his track one evening, but it was no use. He is very active, you know. As quick as a cat. He goes out of this hotel at one door and comes right in at another. He gets on a car going one way, jumps off that and boards one going the other way when both cars are at full speed. If any one tried to fol-

low him when he does that stunt they would either break their necks or he would know they were following him. He went out of this hotel to-night about ten o'clock, and a man tried to follow him. In half an hour the man was back again, having given it up. Jacobs thinks that Walton's beard and mustache are false, because he says if they were it would be impossible to recognize him without them, there being nothing peculiar about his features that a detective could fix."

"All this is most extraordinary," Maynard commented, looking worried. "I cannot realize it, you know."

"I am afraid I have trespassed on your time too long now, Mr. Maynard," said the manager, bowing. "I see clearly, although I trust you will pardon me for saying it, that this is not an old or tried acquaintance of yours by any means. Let me warn you to be very careful. Shall I send your card up now?"

"Not yet. I will think over what you have said first." The manager bowed again, handed him the card, opened the door and walked away, leaving Maynard standing there, completely nonplussed.

Instead of sending up his card, Maynard thought he would take a short stroll outside

to get a breath of fresh air and to recover his self-possession. The night had grown warmer instead of colder, and he took off his hat to cool his throbbing forehead. He was pacing up and down the sidewalk in front of the hotel, with no idea of what to do next, when he suddenly recollected his cab. He went back and asked the porter where it was.

"That's it over there, sir. Third from the corner. Got number forty-four on the lamp. I noticed it when you drove up. Have it here in a second, sir."

Maynard explained that he wished only to speak to the driver for a moment. Then he crossed the street and the porter saw the driver touch his hat several times very energetically. Whatever they said was in tones too low for any one else to hear, except the cabman's last words as Maynard moved away: "You can depend on me, sir. That will be all right, sir. You can depend on me."

Walking back to the crossing, Maynard was about to return to the hotel when he came face to face with Milton Fletcher.

"I waited for you in the room so long after the time that I was afraid something had happened to you," said Fletcher, "so I came out to have a look round, and here you are. It is

getting late. They will be waiting for us, you know. Where did you leave your cab?"

Maynard was so taken aback by the Englishman's sudden appearance that he did not know what to say. The events of the last half hour had completely upset him. He did not want any scene, especially on the street. During the time he had walked up and down in front of the hotel, he had about made up his mind to carry out the part he had agreed to play, but not until he had from Fletcher some sort of explanation as to who he was and what his business was. He could ask for that in the cab. If the explanation was not satisfactory, he would drive direct to Green's and explain matters to Douglas and Hartley. He felt that the petty interests of the police in hunting for a forger were small considerations beside the danger which he and his friends were running.

Feeling safe with the cabman on the box, he put the best face he could on the matter for the moment, and asked Fletcher to get in first. Turning to the driver, he said aloud: "You know where to go?" to which the cabman touched his hat without answering. Maynard got in, still rather confused as to how he should begin his demand for an explanation, and the cab drove off.

CHAPTER X

IT was nearly two o'clock in the morning when Fletcher cautiously opened the door of the private dining-room at Green's and walked in. Douglas was deep in the attractions of a Welsh rarebit, while Hartley was puffing a cigar. The doctor, always late, had only just arrived.

They noticed that Fletcher was very pale, but otherwise he seemed the same as usual. He would not sit down, but simply laid a red pocket-book on the table in front of the doctor, pulled out his watch and remarked that, according to the agreement, they were to remain in the room until twenty minutes after he had left. With a nod to each he moved toward the door, still keeping his eye on the three men at the table.

In another moment he was gone.

Hartley was the first to speak.

"This thing still seems to me like a big joke," he began. "But I suppose that pocket-book is a sign that the alleged robbery has been committed and that the hunt is on?"

"That's what it is," remarked the doctor dryly. "And I am going to have a Welsh rare-

bit myself now, to pass the time. I was afraid I was too late, but I could not help the delay. Doctors are such slaves. I suppose there is no objection to calling a waiter, if we don't leave the room ourselves?"

The minutes passed. Douglas was lighting a cigar, when he suggested that the doctor should count the money in the pocket-book to see that everything was all right before putting it back in the coat.

"That's so," exclaimed Hartley, with a start. "We must not forget any of these details. I suppose we should all go to see the pocket-book safely deposited in Maynard's old coat. Or can we trust you, doctor?" and he laughed as if it were a great joke.

As he had just finished his rarebit, the doctor picked up the pocket-book very deliberately. There was a little red stain on the cloth where it had lain. The same stain was on his fingers, which he smelt critically.

"Fletcher must have cut his finger or something," he remarked very coolly. "Looks like blood."

Douglas and Hartley both seemed disconcerted at the doctor's words. They drew the tablecloth gingerly toward them and peered at

the stain, while the doctor opened the pocket-book.

"Not a cent in it," he exclaimed. Then he peeped into each compartment again. "Some mistake, I suppose. But I thought the money was to be left in the pocket-book. Perhaps the fugitive wants something for traveling expenses."

Hartley and Douglas looked at each other, and then at the doctor. He tossed the pocket-book over to them for examination.

"Not a red!" exclaimed Hartley. "I thought he was to put five thousand in it. Don't you think we had better go after him and have some sort of an explanation?"

"Not on your life," shouted Douglas. "A bargain's a bargain. We stay here for twenty minutes. We've got eight more yet. If one of you leaves the room I claim the stakes, as you don't abide by the conditions."

"Which way would you go to look for him, I should like to know?" asked the doctor, smiling at Douglas' earnestness. "Sit still and let things slide. You will find Maynard will be round in the morning. Probably he didn't like to risk the actual cash, in case Fletcher was nabbed before he got away from the hotel. It would look all the better to find he had left the

cash at home, you know. If he saw Fletcher was caught, he could say nothing about a pocket-book and mention only the cash."

In spite of anything the doctor could say, Hartley was evidently ill at ease; but he sat there until the twenty minutes had expired. His last words as he jumped into his cab to be driven home were:

"Saturday night, thirty days from now, win or lose, doctor. Good-by."

CHAPTER XI

ON leaving the private room Fletcher went down to the basement. Assuring himself that there was no one in the wash-room at that time of the morning, he walked up to one of the basins and filled a small cup with hot water. Taking out a safety-razor set, he made short work of his beard and mustache.

After a good look at himself in the mirror, he seemed to be satisfied with his job of shaving, if not quite with his altered appearance. He opened the door and glanced up the stairs as if to see if the coast was clear, and seemed rather annoyed to find that the proprietor was standing, with his back against the banister, talking to the head waiter.

As the door creaked on its hinges the proprietor looked down. Apparently realizing that it would attract too much attention to retreat, Fletcher put a bold face on it and ascended the stairs. When he reached the top it was evident that the proprietor did not recognize him, although he looked at him curiously. At that late hour both the proprietor and the head

waiter thought that they knew every one who was on the premises.

It must have been a critical moment for Fletcher. If he could pass the proprietor of a restaurant who had waited on him more than once, had asked him how he liked American cooking, and whose business it was to remember faces, he could probably pass any one. But there was still another test to be undergone—a test which has placed many a man in the hands of the police. He would be obliged to say something, and there is nothing so difficult to disguise as the voice.

He must have done some remarkably rapid thinking during the few moments that it took to mount those stairs, with the eyes of the head waiter and the proprietor upon him the whole time, both of them evidently waiting for the remark which would explain his presence there at that hour in the morning. Little did they dream that ten thousand dollars probably depended on what that remark should be.

CHAPTER XII

MR. GEORGE HARTLEY was late in arriving at his office next morning. When he stepped out of the elevator he found a man pacing up and down the corridor waiting for him.

"Good-morning, Johnson. Been waiting long?" he asked hurriedly. "Come right in."

The visitor was a smooth-faced, stockily built man who wore a heavy coat tightly buttoned up. He held his slouch hat in both hands, and seemed not particularly at ease.

"Well, what news?" demanded Hartley briefly as he ran his hand through a pile of letters that had been placed on his desk.

"Your man never come to no Earlswood Hotel last night, sir."

Hartley turned round in his chair with a start. He looked incredulous.

"No, sir. Never showed up at all. I had three men there; two of them on the entrances. One was in the corridor upstairs. Engaged a room for him day before. They waited till breakfast time this morning, sir, but there wasn't nothing doing." After a pause, seeing

the look of complete dismay on Mr. Hartley's face, he went on: "I think we should have shadowed him from the Realton, sir. Then we'd knowed what hotel he did go to. But you know, sir, you was so sure about his going to the Earlswood we supposed it was all right to wait for him there. We went on watch at ten o'clock; but he never showed up."

"Are you sure the people you had there didn't fail to recognize him?"

"No fear of that, sir. I started on the job right after you gave me the orders on Monday morning, sir. Three of us had walked through the room where he was sitting at the Realton, sir, and had a good look at him. Not an easy man to make a mistake about, that, sir. Fine-looking—almost what you calls handsome. I went up to the Realton the day he moved in, as you ordered, sir, and saw him get out of the cab. Just for the sake of curiosity, and having nothing particular to do, I went over to the hotel he come from, sir. After a talk to the head porter there, sir, I got wise to it that he come from another hotel where his name wasn't neither Walton nor Fletcher, sir."

"What's that?" Hartley almost snapped. "Wait a minute," he added, stepping to the door that led to the outer office and opening it.

Addressing some one there, he said hurriedly: "I'm not in to any one at present, James. Don't disturb me on any account. You understand?"

He came back to his desk, and after turning over a few of the papers, still standing up, he beckoned Johnson to come into the inner room. This room was provided with double doors. Through one of them anything passing in the private office could be heard; but when both were shut this little interior den was absolutely sound-proof. Hartley had found it convenient to let people look into his private office occasionally as a demonstration of the truth of the clerk's assertion that he was not in, while in reality he was in this sanctum, the door of which could not be seen through the door of the private office, as it was in the same wall.

Both men sat down. Hartley pulled open the drawer of a desk and took out a box of cigars, offering one to his visitor and taking one himself.

"Let me get this straight, now," he said. "What was that about another hotel and another name?"

"Well, sir, you know, sir, when you put me on the job, I didn't know what might happen, so I thought I would get all the information I could, sir. It sometimes comes in handy wher

you lose the trail, like we have this one. Of course, sir," twisting his hat nervously, and puffing at his cigar, "I don't want to meddle into none of your business, sir; but it's my opinion that your man is one of the Ardmore gang."

"What's that? Nonsense! Ridiculous! Why, he belongs to the—— But that doesn't matter. Where did you get such an idea as that?"

"To cut it short, sir, he's got Ardmore's bag in his room at the Realton."

"Ardmore's bag! What do you mean?"

"General orders was read out at the head office some weeks ago now, sir, to keep an eye out for a man with a peculiar kind of a Gladstone bag, sir. It was stolen from a gent in Sheffield, and if Ardmore got to this country he had it with him. The bag had a brass-lined slit at the top, with a leather flap over it. The gent that owned it had that put in, so he could slip letters in without unlocking the bag, sir. Ardmore most likely didn't know how peculiar it was, sir, or he wouldn't have carried it. The head porter at the Realton let me take a peep at Mr. James Walton's room, sir, and the bag we're all looking for was right there under his

dressing table, though I would have swore it did not come with him on the cab."

"You must be mistaken."

"Not a bit of it, sir. Course I didn't say nothing to the porter; but I took the manager one side and asked him about this Mr. Walton. Knowing he could be trusted to keep his mouth shut, I told him what was up."

"Why didn't you arrest him at once?"

"We never do that with counterfeiters, sir. We just shadow them to see who they connect with. After a bit we have the whole gang spotted, and all the joints they visit marked down. But I'm coming to the strangest part about your man, sir, and that's this: He's never wrote a letter and never got a letter at any hotel he's been at. No telegrams; nothing. It's very useful to have a sample of a man's writing, sir, so as to tell his letters when they come. I can't find that this one ever wrote a line in his life. That don't seem to me human, that don't, sir."

Mr. Hartley simply drummed on the desk and pulled harder at his cigar.

"The only connection we could trace him to was a pretty stunning-looking girl. Her we marked down, and it's lucky we did, sir, because that's our chance now to pick up the trail again. All these chaps have some woman on the string,

and no matter where they hide, they always connect sooner or later—write her a letter, or come to see her, or something. Now this girl's a stunner, sir, and if he don't write her a letter, or get to see her before long, he's more'n human. The Ardmore gang's famous for getting fine-looking women in tow to push their goods. We've a first-rate man on our list that's just for these jobs, sir. He's expensive, of course; but it pays."

"What jobs do you mean?"

"Why, to get acquainted with the girl, sir. He's a handsome fellow, and has the gift of the blarney to beat the band. No matter how swell she may be, he can get introduced, and after that, trust him. He's a fine dresser, and the girl that can stand him off, or keep a secret from him, after he gets his arm round her waist, ain't born, sir. But he's expensive."

"What do you mean to do, then?"

"Well, sir, if you want us to follow this thing up, and get track of your man again, it will cost about two hundred to get Frank Doremus started on the job."

"That's your handsome man with the blarney, eh?"

"Yes, sir. Of course you know enough about women to understand that a man has to flash

the wad to get along easy with them, sir. Your poor chap has to waste too much time. The man with the dough can get her anything or take her anywhere she wants to go. Theaters and things like that, you know."

"Then you think you have lost track of him? Don't you think you could pick him up again in some other way than through this girl?"

"He's an old hand, sir. He can lose a shadow better than any man I ever followed. Why, he went in the Waldorf one evening, Thirty-third Street corner; took the elevator to the ninth floor; walked across to the other side in the Astoria; took the elevator up to the tenth and then walked down to the seventh. I seen him just in time to dodge. Course if he met me again he would have knowed the job I was on, and I might as well go home and take off my clothes. You can't shadow a man like that, sir. All that Ardmore gang's clever."

Hartley did not appear to be paying much attention to this last piece of description. He was pacing up and down the little sanctum, puffing at his cigar.

"But wasn't there any row at the Earlswood last night? Did nothing happen?"

"Nothing out of the ordinary, sir. What was you expecting to happen?" Mr. Johnson

asked this question with evident curiosity, and awaited the answer with his ears wide open.

"Oh, nothing!" flicking the ashes from his cigar. "But it is certainly extraordinary. Do you think you could pick up the trail if you knew any place he was at late last night?"

Mr. Hartley's thoughts were running on the empty pocket-book now. He was debating with himself whether it would be safe to tell Mr. Johnson that Mr. Milton Fletcher had been at Green's restaurant at two o'clock in the morning. Upon further deliberation, he concluded it was not.

Then it occurred to him to call up Dr. Ramie and ask him if he had seen Maynard that morning, and, if so, whether the five thousand dollars was all right. He went into the outer office and had a talk with the doctor over the telephone. The doctor had not tried to find Maynard yet. Did not expect to until dinner time.

Hartley went over and spoke to the cashier. Going back into the private office, he handed Johnson two hundred dollars in bills, and told him to go ahead with the Doremus end of it, but on no account to mention his employer's connection with the matter to any one outside.

"No matter what they find out about this Fletcher, or whoever he turns out to be; not a

word about my having anything to do with him, remember," Hartley repeated with emphasis.

"You can trust me for that, sir," said Johnson, drawing himself up, and stuffing the bills into his pocket.

"Here's a fifty for yourself," Hartley added. "Keep me posted; but not a word about anything to any one. I'll pay all the costs, but keep it quiet. That man must be found, if money will do it. I should think if he was one of the Ardmore gang the whole police force would be after him."

"They don't know it, sir. If there's anything in the job of pinching him, I want it for myself. I'm the only one that seen that bag, sir. That is, to recognize it."

"Where is it now?"

"I'm going up to the Realton to find out, sir. Course I expected to see it come round to the Earlswood last night."

"Would it help matters any—I mean, would it save any time in locating him, if the police were informed about that bag? Perhaps the Pinkertons would like to know it."

Johnson did not seem to like the suggestion, but he pulled himself together after a moment and answered slowly: "I don't think so, sir. The Pinkertons ain't no good for jobs like this,

sir, they not having seen him, like I have. I think you'd better trust me and Doremus to work the girl, sir. In a week that chap will get word to her somehow. If he don't, as I said before, sir, he ain't human. Good-day, sir."

CHAPTER XIII

AFTER attending to the signature of a few letters, Hartley felt that it was time to run over to the Downtown Club for luncheon. While there he took occasion to ask one of his friends, Judge Windom, whom he knew to be familiar with such matters, how a person could get a few minutes' chat with a central office detective.

"You know," he added hastily, seeing the curious look on his friend's face, "we have missed some important papers from the office lately, and I thought if I could just have a little advice from one of those fellows, on the quiet, you understand—not a word about this to any one, if you please—why, it might be useful."

"Nothing simpler, my dear fellow. I'll just call up a friend of mine at Mulberry Street and tell him you would like to see an officer. Where shall I say?"

"Perhaps it would be better to meet him here. Say in half an hour."

The judge called for the boy to bring him the telephone book, and while he was gone for it remarked to Hartley:

"You are right to call on the regular police in all these things. Some people don't like the idea of it, and go to private detective agencies. As an experienced criminal judge, let me advise you never to have anything to do with private detective agencies. Go to Mulberry Street or Pinkerton's. There are so many skins and blackmailers among these little fellows. They watch both client and suspect, and whichever has the *most* money they skin. Very often they skin them both."

This little piece of gratuitous advice made Hartley wince. While the judge was gone to the telephone, he wondered what had prompted the giving of it. Johnson was a private detective!

A few minutes passed, and the judge returned.

"Very sorry, old man," he said, "but it appears the whole force is out on a murder case, trying to find who drove a certain cab last night. It seems they found a bloody cab at daylight this morning, somewhere on the river front. Very interesting case, they tell me, and it's all in the afternoon papers. Here, boy, get us two of the latest afternoon editions you can find. Any of the picture papers will do."

The two men sat down to enjoy their cigars, and five minutes later both were looking at a

picture of a cab, with the door open, the cushions lying on the ground beside it, and a mob of curious people standing round, just far enough from the vehicle to give the photographer room.

It appeared that the cab, with the horse still in the shafts, had been found at the end of a lonely dock, close to the river's edge, at daylight. There was no driver with it, and nothing in the cab itself; but the cushions were slashed here and there, and the whole cab was soaked with blood, some of which had run out from under the door and frozen on the step and on the ground.

The curious thing about the cab was that on the lamp was "No. 44"; but that when the police went to look up that number and find the owner, they discovered that cab No. 44 had left the stable that morning at eight o'clock and was on the rank at the Central Station, with its proper driver.

Judging from the traces of frozen blood that led to the edge of the dock, whatever had been in the cab had been thrown into the water, and they were then at work dredging the river. As no one knew what time the tragedy had occurred, it was difficult to say whether the tide had been running up stream or down at the

time the body, if there were a body, had been thrown in.

Having read over the account and glanced at some other items in the paper which interested him more, Hartley went back to his office, leaving the judge still poring over the minutest details of the cab mystery. At parting, the judge promised that one of the central office men should call on Hartley next day or the day after.

CHAPTER XIV.

THAT evening, after having dined at home, Hartley drove down to the club, where he hoped to find Dr. Ramie or Maynard. Neither of them was there, and when he called up the doctor at his office, he found that the doctor had been out all afternoon and was not expected to return until late.

Several of the men at the club were talking about the murder in the cab. The latest news was that the result of dragging the river was the finding of a man's leg. The dredgers had also fished up a demijohn, which was full of reddish colored water. The police thought it might have been used in an attempt to catch the blood coming from the cab, or in carrying water to the cab in an attempt to wash it off. Their theory was that the cab had been abandoned because of the tell-tale frozen blood on the door and the step.

A rather puzzling thing about the case was that the police had taken the cab to the stable in order to see how it was that the owner came to have two cabs bearing the same number, only

one of which was registered. The two cabs had stood there together for several hours; they had been gazed at by hundreds of persons, and had been photographed by dozens of newspaper men before any one had noticed anything peculiar about the numbers on the lamps.

A sign-painter, happening to stop in front of the stable out of curiosity, pointed out that while one cab had the numerals "44" on the lamp, the other was marked "No." 44. This led the few drivers and stablemen who were standing around to compare notes, and to concur in the opinion that no cab ever had the lettering "No." in front of its number. After getting closer to the cab, the crowd having made way for him as if he were an authority, the sign-painter remarked that the lettering was never done by a man who had learned the trade; because both the down-strokes of the "N" were heavy, instead of being light, while the diagonal stroke was light instead of being heavy. The crowd did not attach much importance to this criticism; several men thought the lettering was all right, and they did not hesitate to say so.

This made the painter angry, and he went close up to the lamp. A glance told him that the right number of the cab was 1144, and that the 11 had been turned into an N and a small

"o" had been put between the 11 and the 44. He said the alteration was never done by a sign-painter, nor with paint; but with some sort of liquid glue, mixed with ink. Upon hearing this opinion, the policeman in charge took it upon himself to remove both lamps, after getting the sign-painter's name and address, and getting three stablemen to witness that the lamps with the altered numbers came from the bloody cab.

With this information at hand, the police had lost no time in finding the owner of the cab registered as No. 1144. The owner of the vehicle said the cab had left the stable the evening before, and the driver had telephoned that, while he went into a house for a minute with a fare, the horse had run away. Where the telephone message came from they did not know, and the driver had not returned. The police lost no time in going to the cabby's home; but he had not been seen since the night before.

Hartley passed half an hour reading over the details and looking at the pictures of the dock, and the dredges, and the stable, and the house where the cabman lived. Then he began to feel restless, and, as there was no sign of the doctor or Maynard, he drove to the theater and saw the last acts of the latest play. Then he went home.

CHAPTER XV

THE next morning Hartley was at his office at ten o'clock sharp. On his way downtown he had looked over the morning papers with a sort of idle curiosity, and had seen that the latest development in the cab murder case was the finding of some other part of the body; this time an arm and hand, with the same evidence of rough-and-ready surgery in the separation.

The theory of the police was that the driver of the cab was an accomplice, and that the story of the horse's running away was a lie, pure and simple. All their efforts had been directed to tracing this driver, and, strange to say, they found him in their own custody, safely locked up in a police station.

It appeared that this driver of cab No. 1144 had been thrown out of a saloon about two o'clock on the night of the murder, dead drunk, and had been taken to the nearest station-house. It was not until he had slept off the effects of his spree that he was able to tell about the loss of his cab. Instead of being allowed to go free, as he had expected, he was astonished to hear

the magistrate commit him to prison as a material witness, if not something more closely connected with the murder.

To an experienced criminologist, the cabman's innocence would have been evident from his manner, and from the straightforward way in which he told his story. All he knew, he said, was that when the cab had disappeared he had gone to the saloon to telephone. As it was a cold night, and his fare had given him five dollars, he had proceeded to get warm by imbibing hot whiskies. In his opinion, the drinks that he had taken earlier in the evening were stronger than he imagined. There was no other way to account for his being knocked out so quickly. He depended on the saloon-keeper to prove an alibi, so far as his possible presence at the dock was concerned. Fortunately for him, having been gathered up from the sidewalk by the police, he was able to trace the saloon in which he had passed the time. Where the house to which he had taken his fare was located he could not remember. It was either a block above or below the saloon, and to the right or left. He had no idea of the number. The police attached no importance to that, apparently. All they cared for was to satisfy themselves that this man had not driven the cab

to the dock where it was found. The riddle for them to solve was: Who had?

Having read all about the case, Hartley stuffed the newspaper into his pocket. After he had looked over his morning mail, he rang the bell and told the boy to send in Mr. James McBride.

McBride was a tall, handsome young fellow, with blond curly hair. He had a decidedly good face and a certain look about him that suggested cleanness, both in body and mind. His clear blue eyes and red cheeks told of a healthy outdoor life. McBride was Hartley's confidential secretary, and had better prospects than any man in the office. His appearance and his abilities, Hartley had remarked, would make his fortune if he would only attend a little more strictly to business; but the young man was a little too fond of athletics. Hartley, however, always expressed the hope that his secretary would "steady down" in time.

"As long as he doesn't get to be a champion," Hartley had remarked to a friend, "he is all right. But the moment these athletic fellows get to be champions and the girls begin running after them, they're no good for business. I gave the trainer a fifty to keep McBride from ever being good enough to enter for the champion-

ships, and just to make things sure, I always have some little matter to attend to in Denver or St. Paul the day the championships come off."

Even without being a champion, James McBride had more than his share of attention from the girls, but this did not alarm Hartley so much. "As soon as Miss Right comes along," he used to say, "James will be a red-hot lover, and I don't think the engagement will be a long one. The sooner the better for me; because once a man's married you've got him. Married men are not so quick at giving up their jobs as single ones, and they don't care much about championships."

After his usual good-morning greetings McBride took his instructions carefully, and went over briefly some matters that required Hartley's personal attention; all in a very businesslike way, which evidently pleased Hartley so much that he said he was sorry James did not smoke, or he would offer him one of his fifty-cent cigars. McBride thought smoking interfered with his wind, and he considered his ability to do a quarter in fifty-four seconds much more important than the enjoyment of a cigar. It was the wind that Hartley was anxious to break up.

About ten minutes after the morning's confer-

ence was finished and McBride had returned to the outer office, he tapped at the door, and put his head in with a smile.

"Mr. Douglas just called up on the telephone, sir, to know if you were in. Says he'll be right down"; and the smile broadened, as if the news were a good joke.

"You don't mean Frank Douglas?"

"Yes, sir," still smiling.

"What the dickens is he coming here for?"

"I thought it rather curious myself, sir. He hasn't been in this office since that little stock transfer about two years ago. What shall I say when he comes? That you will see him?"

"Oh, yes. I suppose I'll have to see him."

Hartley had not long to wait. That Frank Douglas was very much excited was evident. He strode into the private office without even saying good-morning. Once inside, he shut the door behind him very carefully, and looked as if he wished to lock it. Then he took rapid steps to Mr. Hartley's desk, and fumbled in his pocket. He did not even take off his hat.

Pulling out a newspaper, and thrusting it under Hartley's nose, he jabbed a big headline excitedly with his forefinger.

"Read that," he gasped under his breath. "By gad! this is a pretty kettle of fish!"

Hartley was quite taken aback by his visitor's manner. Was there a big bank failure, or what had happened?

"Sit down, my dear fellow," he said reassuringly. "You seem to be all worked up about something. What's the matter?"

"Matter? Read that," was all Douglas could say, jabbing his finger into the paper again.

Hartley glanced at the paper and found that the part indicated was under the double headlines of the cab-murder case. He glanced down the column carelessly.

"Well, my dear fellow, I don't see anything in this that interests me particularly. I read it all in the morning paper."

"*That* wasn't in the morning paper," gasped Douglas, pointing a shaking finger at one of the pictures.

"I see they found an arm and a hand, with a ring on one finger. I read that before. What's the matter with you, Douglas?"

"Yes! A ring! Look at it! There's a picture of the ring. Can't you see it?"

"Why, of course I see it. What of it? Say, what's the matter with you?"

"Don't you see the picture of that ring? Don't you see the star-shaped business, and the

snake's head at one side and the fish at the other? Don't you see it's Maynard's ring?"

For a moment Hartley felt a cold chill run down his back. Douglas took off his hat and wiped his forehead. In doing it he knocked off his glasses and broke them. He picked up the pieces with unprintable comments. Hartley looked up from the paper.

"I confess I did not recognize it as Maynard's ring. Didn't know he wore a ring." Then after a pause, looking furtively at Douglas: "But you don't mean to say that you think——"

"Course I mean it. That's why there was no money in that pocket-book. That's why there was blood on it. That fellow Fletcher not only robbed him; he killed him. And threw him in the river. That's what!"

"Oh, nonsense! You are crazy. What—Fletcher? Impossible! And yet——" The truth of what Johnson had told him burst upon him like a flash; but he tried to keep up his appearance of incredulity. "What makes you think it's Maynard's ring?" he asked.

"Why, didn't he show it to us at Green's that night? Didn't he explain the design to us?"

"Don't remember. I think you're a little off this morning, Douglas."

"No! That's so! You hadn't come yet.

You didn't notice it. It was just after dinner. I think I was the one that asked about it. He took it off and handed it to us to look at. The marks on it had some Dutch name. The moment I saw it in the paper I recognized it." He stood up and wiped his forehead again. "What I want to know now is: Who is that fellow Fletcher, and where is he?"

"I thought you were the one that was betting they couldn't find him," remarked Hartley dryly, thinking hard at the same time.

"Oh, that's all rot and nonsense now. We've got to find him and shut his mouth somehow. When he's caught, the whole story will come out, and we'll all go to Sing Sing for putting up the job with him. That's what. Even if we got off, how the boys would guy us for picking up a crook like that and taking him to dinner!"

Hartley turned a shade paler at the mention of Sing Sing. He had not thought of that before.

"I'm going right to my lawyer, Groscup," continued Douglas, wiping his face again, "and I'm going to tell him the whole thing. And then, if they don't pinch me before two o'clock, I'm off to Europe by the first steamer. She sails at two."

"But if you make any such extraordinary

move as that you will attract attention and suspicion to yourself at once," observed Hartley, who was nevertheless very much in the humor to cut and run for it himself.

"I'm going to get Groscup's advice upon it. What I want to know is: Who is this fellow Fletcher? How did you meet him? I don't know where to go to ask about him."

"Take my advice, and don't ask any one. If you do, they will lock you up as a witness."

"But there must be something wrong somewhere. How did you come to know him?"

"I never saw him before the dinner that night at Green's. He was Dr. Ramie's guest, and an old friend of Maynard's, I understood. I don't know any more about him than you do."

"But aren't you going to find out?"

"On the contrary, I think it is best for us to keep cool, and say 'nothing to nobody about nothing.' That's Chuck Conners' advice for all such cases."

"Well, I'm going to get legal advice upon it. If I don't call you up after two o'clock this afternoon, you will know that I'm off to Europe until this thing blows over."

"I wouldn't do it," advised Hartley, who did not like the idea of being left alone to face the trouble should it come. "Fancy being a week

without any kind of news, looking forward to being nabbed the moment you landed on the other side, and hauled off to an English prison to await extradition. Take my advice and stay here. There's some mistake about something. If what you think is so one thing is clear to me," he added, with an attempt at a laugh: "you will lose your little bet, all right. The police will have that fellow inside twenty-four hours, if the ring belonged to Maynard."

Douglas could only spread his hands and shrug his shoulders as he left the room, nodding a hasty good-by, putting the pieces of his glasses in his pocket.

Left to himself, Hartley's coolness disappeared. In a disturbed frame of mind he began to walk up and down the office. Then he took out a fresh cigar and set himself to think out a course of conduct.

What had happened was pretty clear to him. Some shrewd member of the Ardmore gang had picked up an acquaintance with Maynard, somehow, and had marked him for a plucking. The little after-dinner bet was seized upon and cleverly worked up as an opportunity. The man that drove the cab must have been a member of the gang, and the two of them had found that Maynard resisted when they would not go to the

Earlswood Hotel. Then they had knocked him on the head. If the story ever came out, Hartley, the smart business man, the director in fifty companies, the president of the Hardware Trust, would be the laughing-stock of the town. Why is it that some men fear ridicule more than imprisonment?

To one thing Hartley quickly made up his mind. He would not consult any lawyers, and he would refuse to say a word to any one about either Maynard or Fletcher. He would deny that he had ever known either of them. He was sorry now that he had called in Johnson. But perhaps it was lucky that he had not called in the Pinkertons. They would haul him up at once when they found the clue. So would the regular police. Still, he felt uneasy about Johnson. To put a private detective on the track of a thief, or one who he knew would turn out to be a thief, was one thing. To have set a detective to watch a man who, it now turned out, was deliberately planning a cold-blooded murder, was something else. The nasty part of it was that he, Hartley, would appear to have known the very hour, almost, that the crime was to be committed.

He would have to stop Johnson's activity somehow, and also to stop the detective's mouth.

It would cost a pretty penny, probably, and would perhaps expose him to blackmail for the rest of his life. But he could not help that now. He was in a hole, and he knew it. He would have given ten thousand dollars twice over that minute if he had never seen Johnson.

His meditations were interrupted by McBride, who put his head in the door again.

"Man to see you, sir. Says confidential business. Sent here by Judge Windom."

"I don't want him now. Send him away. No! Stop a minute. Yes. Send him in. What am I talking about?"

The man entered, closed the door behind him quietly and walked up to Hartley, mentioning his name. At the same time he opened his coat, disclosing a detective's shield. Hartley had never seen one before, and did not know it from a fire badge; but the connecting circumstances told him what it was.

"I am very sorry," he began, thinking of the best way to get rid of his visitor as smoothly as possible, "but we found it was all a mistake. Something got filed away wrong. Important documents, you know. Thought some one had stolen them. Awfully sorry to trouble you." He wished the man would not look at him so hard, as if he knew he was lying. Hartley

wondered how he would feel if one of those keen-eyed fellows were to come and ask him some questions about Fletcher and Maynard.

The detective turned his hat round in his hands, and seemed not to know exactly what to say. He muttered something about making a report. In order to relieve the tension of the situation, Mr. Hartley pulled out a roll of bills and offered the man a twenty, telling him he was sorry there was nothing for him to report. Everything was all right now.

In another minute he was alone again, wishing that Johnson could be disposed of as easily.

CHAPTER XVI

AFTER pacing up and down his office for half an hour, without coming to any conclusion about anything except to keep his mouth shut, Hartley suddenly determined to send for his carriage and drive up to Dr. Ramie's. If Douglas went to Europe, he and the doctor would be the only ones left. They should have an understanding.

The doctor took Hartley into his private room and locked the door. Yes, he had seen the papers and had recognized the ring. He did not seem as much excited about the matter as Hartley had expected, but he was insistent on the importance of their keeping quiet.

Dr. Ramie explained that he had never seen Fletcher before that dinner at Green's, and that he knew him only as a friend of Maynard. How long Maynard had known him, or where he had met him, the doctor had no idea. The whole thing looked to him now, he said, as if Maynard had been marked for a victim for some time past, and that Fletcher must be an adventurer of some kind. These views so closely agreed with Hartley's own that he came very

near making the mistake of telling the doctor that he was quite right. Catching himself just in time, he went to the other extreme, and tried to put the doctor off the track.

"But why should Fletcher kill Maynard for the money, doctor, when he was to get it anyway by being allowed to rob him of it?"

"That is what is puzzling me," answered the doctor slowly. "I think that Fletcher must have refused to go to the hotel, or something must have excited Maynard's suspicions at the last moment. These fellows often get too eager when the game is near an end, you know, and Maynard may have become alarmed. He may have wanted to go somewhere else. I cannot see how they got into the same cab unless that was the case. I thought Fletcher was to be at the hotel beforehand, so as to be ready to rob Maynard as soon as he arrived. They probably had words in the cab, and Fletcher, seeing the game was up, threw off all disguise and grabbed Maynard by the throat, or stabbed him, or something. He must have had a confederate on the box, driving the cab, unless he killed the driver, too."

"But what would excite Maynard's suspicions? You don't suppose that he had found out Fletcher's real character, do you, and was afraid

to carry out the scheme we had agreed on? I think perhaps that is why the pocket-book was empty. Maynard may not have liked to trust himself with so much money in the company of a forger."

"A forger! What do you mean?"

Mr. Hartley turned very pale. He saw the slip he had made. "I didn't mean a forger. I meant an amateur thief, you understand. I was thinking that we had agreed it was to be a forgery, or something of that kind."

The doctor evidently did not understand. He looked at his visitor so critically that Hartley winced, but could not think of anything further to say. It flashed across Hartley's mind to take the doctor into his confidence as to his dealings with Johnson; but that would at once betray the fact that he had acted in shockingly bad faith with regard to the wager.

"Well, doctor," he said at length, "what are you going to do about it? It seems to me that we are all in a nice mess."

"Do?" said the doctor, as if coming out of a dream about something. "Do nothing. Keep absolutely quiet. Ask no questions. Make no mention of either Fletcher or Maynard to any one. None of our friends knows that we have

ever met Fletcher. You met him as my guest only. Ever see him anywhere else?"

"No. How about your part of it? If the whole thing comes out, where do you stand?"

"I am not worrying. I have your checks in the safe there, and I expect to collect a hundred from you on the side."

"Oh, you do, eh? I guess not."

"I certainly do. Look here, Hartley. You are unnecessarily excited about this affair because you have a guilty conscience. That makes you forget how little other people know. I never lose sight of the fact that trouble must find you, unless you go hunting for it. What is it that you are so alarmed about? They have found a cab and parts of a body. The body has not even been identified yet——"

"Why, that ring gives the whole thing away."

"Did you recognize it the moment you saw the picture of it?"

"Why, no. To tell the truth, I didn't. Douglas told me it was Maynard's ring."

"Well, Douglas won't tell any one else. He called me up on the 'phone and asked me if I had seen the picture of the ring in the papers. I turned the conversation at once, because you never know who is listening at a telephone. I

sent him a note immediately, warning him to keep his mouth shut."

"He's going to Europe this afternoon."

"It does not matter where he goes. We are going to stay here. At least I am. We must remember that the police have not yet established the fact that it was Maynard that was killed in that cab. They are also a very long way from finding out who it was that was in the cab with him. If it were not for the pocket-book I should be willing to bet that Fletcher did not know anything about the cab. I have read the newspaper accounts very carefully, and what I, as a doctor, cannot for the life of me understand is why a murderer should stop to cut up a body in a cab, with the thermometer below freezing, instead of throwing the whole thing into the river. To hack off the head would have destroyed the identity. I have had some experience in amputations, and that job on the dock, if it was done on the dock, must have taken an hour. Then I cannot see how a man in a cab could carry out such a piece of work without the knowledge and assistance of the cabman. There must have been an accomplice. Then another thing is that Fletcher would surely never have been so foolish as to return to Green's to

deliver an empty pocket-book if he had just committed a murder."

"But there was blood on the pocket-book when you got it, you remember. You thought Fletcher had cut his finger."

"Yes, I remember that very well, and it has worried me quite a bit. Still, I cannot think that Fletcher, knowing even as little of the man as I do, could be guilty of such a crime. Between you and me," looking at his visitor sharply out of the corner of his eye, "I should not be at all surprised if it turned out that Maynard had been killed by some one else, after Fletcher had left him at the Earlswood Hotel."

"But they never went to the hotel."

"Indeed! How do you know that? That is a very important piece of evidence if you can prove it."

This time Hartley turned scarlet. "The fact is," he stammered, thinking hard and fast, and getting redder, if that were possible, every second—"the fact is I was a little worried about that pocket-book being empty, and as I couldn't get Maynard on the 'phone in the morning, I went up to the Earlswood, thinking he might still be there."

"Indeed!" drawled the doctor. "And where is the hotel? I never heard of it before."

This was a poser. Hartley had not the slightest idea where the hotel was. He stammered something about having driven there in a cab and not noticing particularly, and so forth, and then, beginning to feel decidedly uncomfortable, he concluded to take his leave.

As he went down the steps he congratulated himself that he had kept his secret about Johnson. It was some satisfaction to think that he had found out all that the doctor knew without telling anything himself. It might have hurt his pride somewhat had he known that the doctor also had his little secret. There was one little incident which the doctor had not mentioned to his visitor, probably because he did not think it necessary. This was that as soon as the false number on the cab was discovered, and the owner named, the doctor went round to see the man. Having hired cabs from that stable many times, and being a good customer, the doctor felt at ease in taking the stable-owner into his confidence and telling him that although the cabman was unable to recollect the house from which the cab had run away or had been stolen, the fact was that cab No. 1144 had disappeared from in front of his own office, and that the cabman's fare, who had given the driver five dollars, was one of his patients.

"Now," the doctor went on, "you know it might hurt my practice quite a little if this were known, and I don't want any notoriety of that kind. The man that came to my office in the cab is a prominent man; one of my best patients. I was out at the time. He went with the driver to look for the cab and didn't come back. I want to be candid with you and tell you the whole story. It appears that he invited the driver inside, and they had several drinks; that is, the cabman did. While they were inside filling up with whisky the cab-horse ran away, or some one ran off with it. Now, that is not a nice story to get into the papers about my office, is it? I should have pictures of my place in all the papers, and a mob of loafers round the door. Why, it would ruin my practice."

The stable-owner shook his head, as if he realized that it was a bad business. The doctor went on:

"Now I don't want your driver to freshen up his memory any more than necessary, and——"

"That'll be all right, sir," interrupted the liveryman, beginning to understand what was wanted of him.

"What I am coming to is this," the doctor continued. "Your cab was damaged quite a bit, I understand, and your driver was locked up,

and all that sort of thing. Now let me pay you fifty toward the damage to the cab, and if there is anything left, make a Christmas present of it to the driver; but give him to understand that he is to forget where he went that night. Is that fair?"

The liveryman insisted that it was not the doctor's fault that the cab was "all mussed up," as he expressed it; but he did not like to refuse the fifty, and he promised the doctor that nothing should be said about where the cab was when the horse ran away. He always protected his customers, and the doctor was a good one.

CHAPTER XVII

AS the days passed, the headlines in the daily papers referring to the cab murder became smaller and smaller. All attempts to find any further portions of the body had failed, and no one had recognized the ring as Maynard's; or if they had, they had not told the police.

What was stranger still, according to the papers, was that there was not the slightest clue to the driver of the cab. That any man should stop a runaway horse in the street, or should steal a horse and cab and drive it all over New York without leaving a trace, was something that the detectives could not understand. The murderer might be a shrewd and intelligent man, they said, but any one in the cab-driver class should be easily traced; if by nothing else, through the betrayal of his confidence by his friends. He would be sure to talk of the exploit to some one unless he were an accomplice himself.

As there were no new developments, at least none that were given out to the press, the whole thing seemed to be passing from the public

mind. All that was necessary to blot it out entirely was another big sensation. On the fifth day that sensation came, and all the news about cab No. 44 was tucked away in the inside pages of the papers without even a subhead over it.

Hartley was congratulating himself on the success of his policy of silence. Nothing had happened to disturb his peace of mind so far. The only thing that worried him was the non-appearance of Johnson. He had not seen the detective since he had advanced the money to engage the services of the charming Mr. Doremus. Nothing would have pleased Hartley better than to know he had seen the last of Johnson; but that astute individual was not at all anxious to lose sight of Hartley.

When they had parted at their last interview Johnson had carried out his avowed intention of going back to the Realton to see what had become of that bag. A cigar to the head porter and a little casual talk about nothing in particular led to the proposition to have another look at Mr. James Walton's room. That was on Friday morning.

The room was empty.

Johnson was worried. The porter assured him that no baggage had been taken from that room on a call from the office, but he suggested

that a guest might take hand-baggage down and put it in the checkroom. A careful search of the checkroom could not be undertaken until some time between four and six in the morning unless Johnson wanted to get out a search-warrant, but for a slight consideration the head porter managed things so that the detective could look over the bags that had been checked since Wednesday.

Neither that search nor the one that took place in the early hours of the morning showed any trace of the bag. Nevertheless, it was there. In devoting his attention to the Ardmore bag, Johnson had not observed another very ordinary bag which was under Walton's bed at the time of the detective's first visit to the room. The bag that was under the bed was now in the checkroom, and the Ardmore bag was inside it with some of Mr. James Walton's effects.

Finding himself off the scent of the bag itself, Johnson strolled round to the hotel again in the afternoon and tried to gather some information as to the movements of the bag's owner. No one had seen Mr. Walton. The head porter did not think he had left the hotel, as guests always gave up their keys, and the office then gave notice to the maids to change the rooms.

"Fact is," the porter added, "I've been

bothered so much since yesterday about that cab that I haven't had time to think about much else."

"What cab was that?"

"Why, this here cab No. 44. It was around here that night, and the gent that was with it must have been the guy that was killed, or the one that did it."

"Couldn't you recognize the man?"

"Yes, I guess I could, although it was pretty dark and I didn't pay much attention to him. Being new here, I don't know the customers at this hotel yet, you know. What I'm sorry for was that I didn't notice the driver. As soon as I handed it out that No. 44 was waiting around here that night, the fly cops come up by the dozen and pumped me dry, and all the reporters got the story of my life and some of 'em took my picture. To-day they was after me hot and heavy, and seemed more anxious to know if the man had a ring on his finger or not. I didn't see no ring. As to the driver, all I noticed about him was that he was most too polite for a cabby. Touched his hat a bit too much. English style, you know."

"Wasn't the man in the cab a guest of the hotel? Didn't he dine here or anything?"

"Can't say as to that. The fly cops asked me

all that. He went into the hotel and was inside half an hour, I suppose. When he came out he went over to have a talk to the cabby. That's when I remember telling him his cab was No. 44. That's the last I seen of him. I suppose the guy that was killed was inside the cab all the time, already cut up, maybe."

Johnson went into the lounging room and lit a cigar. After picking out a comfortable chair he sat down and began to think, turning over in his mind various possibilities, some of which were very improbable. Among these was the possibility that Mr. Walton might have been the man with the cab. He got up and went back to the head porter, and asked him if he had heard any directions given to the driver of that cab—to go to the Earlswood Hotel, for instance. No, he had not. Did he think it at all possible that Mr. Walton might have been the man that came in the cab? No, he was quite sure it was not. He knew Mr. Walton by sight, and had received a very liberal tip from the gentleman.

Johnson sat down again and did more thinking. Then he questioned several of the clerks and other persons who were on watch Thursday night, to see if any of them could recollect a man that had dropped into the hotel for half an hour or so. It would seem that hundreds of

men might have done so without attracting the slightest attention.

Finally he went to the manager.

After considerable sparring, during which Johnson felt that something was being held back, he gathered that a gentleman had called for Mr. James Walton on Thursday night, and that this gentleman was personally known to the manager, who did not wish to disclose his identity. The detective was sharp enough to see his advantage and to make the most of it, so that the manager finally agreed, on the understanding that Johnson would consider the matter as strictly confidential, to send him up to have a talk with Mr. Maynard. Johnson could then personally confirm some of the things that the manager had taken the liberty of telling Mr. Maynard in order to put him on his guard.

Johnson rejoiced inwardly. He had picked up another clue. He had found a man that knew Mr. Walton.

So the reason that Hartley had not seen anything of Johnson for nearly a week was that Johnson was hunting high and low for Maynard and had put a relief watch on his apartment night and day.

The janitor told him that Mr. Maynard had left no word as to how long he would be away.

He often went away for a week or two without saying anything about it. Being a bachelor, there was no reason why he should explain his movements to any one.

While engaged in his search for Maynard, Johnson had looked up many of the retired broker's old business haunts and had made minute inquiries as to his habits and his connections. He had found an old servant that had often waited on him at table and had overheard many things, but nothing that would throw any light on his probable destination, if he went off on a trip by himself.

During the vigils of these two or three days Johnson had done a great deal more thinking and had constructed and rejected a number of theories. What bothered him was to reconcile Mr. Hartley's knowledge of Mr. James Walton's intended movements and the fact that the movements had not taken place. That Mr. Hartley was very much astonished at Mr. Walton's failure to arrive at the Earlswood Hotel was clear. That he did not know what had prevented that arrival was also clear. By putting this and that together, Johnson came to the conclusion that it was Mr. Maynard that had interfered with or prevented Mr. Walton's arrival at the Earlswood Hotel. Consequently, Mr.

Maynard probably knew the direction in which Mr. Walton had actually gone. What he would very much like to know now was, whether or not Mr. Hartley was acquainted with Mr. Maynard as well as with Mr. Walton. If so, it was just possible that he could throw some light on the matter if he knew that Mr. Maynard and Mr. Walton were together at the time that one of them should have gone to the Earlswood Hotel. The idea was gradually becoming a conviction in Johnson's own mind that Mr. Walton and Mr. Maynard were together in cab No. 44 on Thursday night.

Johnson had carefully noted the time of the cab's arrival at the hotel, as given him by the head porter. He found that it agreed exactly with the time of the call that was afterward canceled, but still stood on the stub, for Mr. James Walton. When the manager's description of Mr. Maynard was repeated to the head porter, without giving the porter the slightest hint that it was the manager's, he admitted that it was pretty close to the appearance of the man that got out of the cab when it arrived at the hotel that night.

Having fully satisfied himself that both Maynard and Walton had completely disappeared on the same night and at about the same time, John-

son made up his mind to put his theory to the test. If he were correct, he was fairly on the way to make a name for himself as the greatest detective in New York. If he were wrong, he had nothing to lose.

The difficulty would be to get the truth from Mr. Hartley, if there were anything of importance to conceal. He realized that. Knowing the psychological value of complete surprise, he determined that he would not approach Mr. Hartley with any roundabout questions as to whether he was acquainted with Mr. Maynard or not, but would put a question to him that would be answered by his manner, truthfully, completely, and at once.

Accordingly, next morning Hartley found the detective pacing up and down the corridor waiting for him.

"Hello, Johnson! Where have you been all this time? Come right in."

They went in, and it was Johnson that suggested their going into the inner and most private office. Having carefully shut all the doors behind him and having made sure that they could not be overheard, he sat down, laid his slouch hat on the desk, and stroked his chin.

Hartley offered him a cigar. He took it and struck a match. After a few puffs, he took it

from his mouth and looked at it critically, as if to see if it was well alight. Then he turned to Hartley, who was tilted back in his chair, evidently nervous, but expecting Johnson to open the conversation.

"Well, Mr. Hartley," the detective began, speaking with great deliberation, "I have located your man. At least, part of him."

"The dickens you have!" exclaimed Mr. Hartley.

"Yes, sir. I may as well cut it short, sir," flicking the fire from the end of his cigar and looking straight at Hartley. "Your friend, Mr. James Walton, was the man that was murdered in that cab last week, and the man that killed him was Mr. Maynard."

In spite of himself, Mr. Hartley had to laugh.

The psychological effect of the sudden and unexpected connection of those two names with the murder was completely overshadowed by the absurdity of the supposition that Maynard was the murderer. Hartley had the presence of mind to continue the laugh until he had time to get out of his chair and turn his back on Johnson for a moment or two, taking a few steps across the room.

In those few steps Hartley's keen intellect had ample time to see the trap laid for him by the

mention of Maynard's name. While he could not imagine how the detective had hit upon the connection between the two men and had almost guessed a riddle which the whole police force of New York had been unable to solve, he saw that he must pretend to be entirely ignorant of any such possible connection himself.

"So you think the only way to account for Mr. Walton's disappearance is to assume that he was murdered, eh?" Then he laughed again and went on glibly: "Well, if you know the murderer—Mayville, did you say?—all you have to do is to go and arrest your man Mayville. Where did you pick him up?"

Johnson realized that he was at fault, but he had another shot in his locker, carefully prepared in advance. He changed his tone to one of almost impudent familiarity and raised his voice.

"Well, it's pretty clear to me, Mr. Hartley, that you know more about Mr. Walton's movements that Thursday night than any one else does. And if we took you up to headquarters and put you through the third degree, we'd find out something."

Douglas' example of going to Europe and Judge Windom's advice about private detectives were about equally prominent in Hartley's mind for a moment. He realized instantly that

he had placed himself at the mercy of the man before him. The question was how to escape.

Johnson's tone was distinctly defiant. Probably the best course would be to adopt the same attitude. Hartley sat down and faced him squarely.

"See here, Johnson, I didn't employ you to question me or to pry into my affairs. I employed you to watch a certain man, and to see where he went to, and to keep me posted so that we could lay our hands on him should the necessity arise. You made a botch of it, and lost him the first jump he made. And you call yourself a first-class detective, and run an agency! Bah!"

Johnson squirmed. This did not promise very well for the realization of his dream of being considered the greatest detective in New York. Hartley went on:

"Now, I don't know anything about Mr. Walton, who he is, or where he comes from, and my reasons for wanting to keep track of him are my business, which I can explain to the satisfaction of any one, headquarters or anywhere else, if necessary; but I shall not do so to you, sir," raising his voice as he saw his advantage. "You might guess my reasons, knowing my financial connections and Mr. Walton's vocation." This was a chance shot, but it went

home. "When we suspect a man is likely to pass counterfeit money on any institution with which we are connected, we like to be able to lay hands on him." This with an emphatic nod. "Now, if you have any absurd theory that the man I employed you to keep track of has been murdered by a person called Mayville, why, go and work out that clue yourself, but you don't do it at my expense, sir. I want you to clearly understand that. Now, how much do I owe you? And your services are no longer required."

This did not suit Johnson at all. He saw that he was choking the goose that laid the golden eggs. That would never do, so he hastened to make all manner of apologies. Of course he was "only just mentioning it" when he said that about headquarters, and hoped Mr. Hartley would not take any offense. And. Mr. Doremus was getting along so nicely, although he had not yet succeeded in getting an introduction to the girl. Some girls were so difficult to approach, and hurry would be fatal to success. But Doremus would soon know all about Mr. Walton and who he was and where he came from. He would also find out whether he was still alive.

At the mention of Doremus and the possi-

bility of unraveling the mystery of Walton's antecedents, if not of his whereabouts, Hartley's second thoughts were that it might be better to continue on good terms with Johnson for the present. If he turned him loose, he might go to the police with his theory, and they might investigate. Hartley felt that he could not browbeat them. When he proposed to Johnson to go on with the case, he stipulated and insisted on the condition that there should not be the slightest communication with the police about anything while Johnson was in Hartley's pay.

"If you have any murder clues to work out, do it when I am done with you," was his parting injunction. "Or at least do it on your own hook. Don't help the police on their job. They won't give you any credit for it. Call on me for all the money you want for yourself and Doremus. You will never get as much by blabbing to the police about your suspicions as you will be attending strictly to your own business and making your reports to me."

The mere mention of being allowed all the money he wanted for expenses settled in Johnson's mind any doubts that he might have had as to his future course. The prospective fame would keep. He could work on his theory of

the murder while he was trying to locate some of Walton's friends. Perhaps he was mistaken after all; but he was getting paid now, whether he was right or wrong.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN spite of his apparent confidence that he had "fixed" Johnson, as he expressed it, Hartley felt uneasy. If Johnson had been able to work out a clue that was so near the truth, some other person might do so. Perhaps other detectives were already on that trail, and were about to spring a surprise upon him; perhaps to arrest him. Somehow or other, that was his great dread—arrest, followed by ridicule. Of the two, he feared most the laugh.

He was in this frame of mind as he sat down to lunch at the club, when he happened to see Mr. Groscup, Frank Douglas' lawyer, enter the room. Beckoning him to the table he asked the attorney to join him, and was glad to find that Groscup had no other engagement. Hartley had got to the point where he felt that he needed legal advice, and he thought it better to trust a man that already knew the case than to make a fresh confidant. As a preliminary, Hartley broached the subject of Douglas' absence and the reason for it, and said that he would like to retain Mr. Groscup as his counsel also.

"If we are going to get into a mess over this piece of foolishness," he said, "we may as well have you engaged for the defense."

The lawyer assured him that there was no immediate danger, but he enlarged upon the importance of Mr. Hartley's not betraying himself. "Nothing is so difficult," he explained, "as for a person with a guilty knowledge of anything to conceal the fact that he knows the true state of the case, when he is talking about the matter to another person who has a wrong idea of it. In spite of himself, he will make slips; or what is just as bad, he will hesitate; showing that he is thinking of some way to frame an answer to a question which an innocent person would reply to immediately."

He went on to say that it would be necessary for Mr. Hartley to be very careful of his conversation with any but his most intimate friends. "You never know who is a detective these days," he continued, "or who is ready to rush off and give hints of things that have been told them in strict confidence. Then, the first thing you know, the police get hold of the story, and there you are."

Hartley explained the difficulty of avoiding people, his business bringing him in contact with so many. He did not like the idea of run-

ning away from the city, as Douglas had done. In his own home, with his family, he was safe, and he could not be stopped and questioned in his private carriage. He seldom or never rode in the cars. The trouble would be to avoid the people that came to the office. They would come to see him without his having the slightest idea of what they wanted, and many persons whom he had never seen sent in their cards.

"Then don't see any strangers," was the lawyer's advice. "There must be some way of finding out whether the people that want to see you are known to you or not or what their business is. Some of our trust magnates have eluded the most skilful process-servers for months."

"The trouble is, they come there and find me in, or they have seen me go into the office; and then it's no use telling them I am not in. If they are told I am engaged, they will wait for hours sometimes. I have found them in the corridor long after the office has been closed. You have no idea how men with money are hounded."

"Why not have some one in your office represent you? Have you no one in the office you could trust to pretend he was Mr. Hartley? People who did not know you would not detect

the difference. Get some one about your own age. The chief thing to avoid is visits from people that may have suspicions and who want to verify them. They will come and spring sudden statements or questions on you; hypothetical questions, we call them."

Hartley winced as he recalled his recent interview with Johnson.

"You must be ready for all kinds of traps," the lawyer continued. "For instance, some one may call you up on the telephone and ask you for Maynard's address, simply to betray you into the acknowledgment that you know Maynard. You should be especially careful of women. They are great information getters. If any strange woman calls on you, don't let her see you, especially if she is good-looking. You are in a bad mess with this thing, and if the whole story ever comes out, you will certainly be charged as an accessory before the fact."

"It was all a foolish after-dinner affair."

"Many little 'after-dinner' affairs have got the diners into serious trouble before now, Mr. Hartley. Take my advice. Keep quiet, see no one, and get some confidential man in your office to see strangers before they get to you. For my part, if it is any satisfaction to you to know it, I think it will turn out eventually that

Fletcher had nothing to do with Maynard's murder. That probably happened some time after Fletcher left him. My theory," continued the lawyer, "would be that some one knew Maynard had that money on him that night, but of course had no idea that Fletcher was to relieve him of it, and that this person was the one that committed the murder. If the mystery is ever cleared up, I think you will find that is it. But for this unfortunate complication of your little after-dinner joke, I should advise going to the police at once, and telling them that the body in the river. was Maynard's."

"That would never do!" exclaimed Hartley hastily, shivering at the very thought. Then he added: "The only thing that makes me doubt your theory is that I think if Fletcher had nothing to do with it, he would come out of his hiding at once, so as to clear himself of the suspicion of the murder."

"There is no suspicion of murder lying against Fletcher, my dear sir. No one has made as much as a guess at the identity of the corpse, much less at the name of the murderer. That is where your guilty conscience shows you are ahead of the facts known to the public."

Hartley smiled as he recalled Johnson's theory, but he deemed it unwise to say anything

about that to Mr. Groscup. It might lead to unpleasant questions.

"From what Douglas told me," continued the lawyer, "this Fletcher is a pretty smart fellow, and stands to win quite a tidy sum if he succeeds in his little game of hide and seek."

"He's got all the money he'll ever make out of it now. That's Maynard's five thousand. The minute he shows up again, the police will pinch him. They will never let him slip through their fingers a second time."

"A second time!" exclaimed the lawyer, lifting his eyebrows. "And pray when was the first time the police had their fingers on Mr. Fletcher, and what for?"

The lawyer's keen glance at Hartley's flushed face showed that he had caught a glimpse of some woolly hair in the woodpile.

Not knowing exactly what to say, Hartley managed to imitate a laugh while he collected his thoughts. Then he said lightly:

"Oh, I've always had a theory that it is never the first offense with these criminals. Take any of them, and look up his past, and you will find it's only the hatching out of a bad egg." He knew the answer did not satisfy the lawyer, who was still looking at him quizzically. Feeling

rather uncomfortable, he pulled out his watch, and declared he must be going back to the office.

As he drove along, he could not help cursing himself for the slip he had just made. The lawyer's remarks had made a great impression on him, and the closing incident of the conversation had amply demonstrated the truth of Groscup's theory about the possession of guilty knowledge. If he betrayed himself in that way to a person that had no suspicions whatever, what would happen if he were skilfully questioned by some one who knew, or who fancied he knew, the facts?

Turning over in his mind the best way to avoid any possible trap that might be laid for him by persons coming to his office, he concluded that it would be just as well to follow the lawyer's advice and have some one to take his place, in case he should be asked for by strangers. Any person that knew him would not be deceived, of course; but so many people asked to see him who did not know whether they were really talking to Mr. Hartley or not, that a substitute should answer very well.

The only question was to find a man of the right age. He did not like to trust every one with such a matter. It would lead to talk, and perhaps to questions. The only person he cared

to ask to undertake it was McBride. He was rather young, of course; but the kind of people Hartley was afraid of would probably not stop to ask questions about ages. He would try it for a day or two, and see how it worked. If anything went wrong, it could easily be turned off with some excuse or other about its being a mistake on the caller's part, or something like that.

He called McBride into his office and explained briefly what he wanted done, without giving the true reason for it, however. His confidence in his clerk stopped short of that point. He harped upon being bothered so much by beggars and such persons shortly before the holidays, and suggested that McBride should sit at his desk for a few days, while he would occupy the inner sanctum, the door of which was visible only when one was well inside the private office.

"You need not say who you are, you know," the older man explained. "If they see you sitting there, they will think you must be Mr. Hartley. Tell the boys that if any one asks for me to show him into this office, just as if I were here. Then you can tackle him. If it's any one I know or want to see," he went on lightly, "I can step out and say howdy-do. But if it's any

any one I don't want to see I shall trust to you to dispose of them in your usual graceful manner. I can hear what goes on from my little den, you know."

CHAPTER XIX

THURSDAY morning, the morning after Hardy Maxwell, or Milton Fletcher, or Stewart, or whatever his name was, had dined at the Ohlstroms' and had made his avowal, Helen Ohlstrom was awake earlier than usual, and looked at herself in the mirror with unaccustomed interest. It seemed to her that by assuring herself that she was still in the flesh, and not dreaming, she could get an answer to the question that was continually running through her head:

"Am I engaged or am I not?"

Her preoccupation at breakfast was so evident that it attracted the attention of her parents; but she turned aside their questions with a laugh. Immediately after breakfast she went out for a walk; but while she looked in the shop windows, and occasionally went in for a moment, she was conscious that she saw nothing, or did not care about what she saw. Her whole mind and imagination were occupied in running over again and again everything that had happened the night before.

She tried to recall Maxwell's exact words.

She could still feel that first kiss upon her cheek. And then, she had kissed him, had she not? Yes, there could be no mistake about that. A woman never forgets the first time she kisses a man full upon the mouth. She could still feel his powerful arms about her waist. She had no idea that he was so strong; or was it that she was so unresisting? And what was it that he had said? How did he express it? Of course she must be engaged! And yet he had not exactly asked her to marry him.

He would surely call again that evening, and then it would be settled. Perhaps he would send her a note. Maybe a messenger would bring something for her during the day; or was it the proper thing for him to put the engagement ring on her finger himself? In her heart she felt that her faith in him was absolute, whether the engagement ring was on her finger or not.

But Hardy Maxwell did not come that evening nor the next. He wrote no line: he spoke no word. It was very strange. She did not like to appear to be running after him, or she would have sent a note to the club. On Sunday she was certain he would call. Dressed in her best frock, with her hair done up in most bewitching fashion, she sat at the window watching for him from two o'clock until tea time. Many a passer-

by cast a longing glance at the window that Sunday afternoon.

After tea Helen went to the window again and stood looking out into the deepening shadows until her mother brought her back into the room. Was there any suspicion in the mother's heart of what was wrong? Did she guess the truth when her daughter went up to her own room shortly after eight o'clock and locked herself in? Who knows?

Monday and Tuesday wore away and Wednesday came, without a word or a sign from Maxwell. The happy recollections, the eager rehearsals of the events of the Wednesday before were changed to a feeling of mortification and chagrin. Helen could not help telling herself that perhaps she had been hasty or foolish, although she had gone too far to retrace her steps. She had given her heart to Hardy Maxwell, and even if he had trampled on it, it was still his. His pledge to secrecy worried her; it added to her sense of humiliation.

But this suspense was becoming too much for her. When her mother remarked that Mr. Maxwell's calls had ceased, she did not answer. When Mrs. Ohlstrom hinted that she feared they had had a quarrel or something, Helen only turned her head away to hide the gathering

tears. Then the mother knew. All she could do was to shake her head sadly and to express a hope that things would turn out all right.

Madge annoyed her more than any one else. Of course the girl had heard all about the handsome young Englishman and knew of his attentions to Helen. In fact, she was to have met Mr. Maxwell that week and had learned the reason why Helen had canceled the invitation that had been given to her. Madge's idea seemed to be that it would be better for Helen to forget all about Maxwell, and to that end she set herself to apply the commonplace remedy of leading her friend to believe that he was not worth remembering.

"Did it ever occur to you that he might be married?" she demanded one day. "You know so many of these Englishmen say nothing about their domestic affairs."

"My uncle did not mention that he was a married man," retorted Helen rather stiffly.

"Of course the introduction was not sent to you. Perhaps your uncle was not aware what an attractive niece he had. Heigh-ho! I suppose it is another case of necessary disappearance, like our mutual friend Mr. Lathrop."

"The two men are not in the same class," replied Helen, flaring up, "although I have

nothing to complain of with regard to Mr. Lathrop. He was always a gentleman when he was with me," and she shot a glance at Madge that made the young lady wince and change color.

"I am sorry I ever told you any of my secrets," Madge retorted. "But," she added almost spitefully, "it's better than having a married man make love to you and go walking with you almost every day, and then take French leave."

"He's not married. It's a lie and you know it," Helen snapped, stamping her foot, her eyes blazing with anger.

"My! But your temper certainly does get the best of you at times, Helen!" answered Madge. "It reminds me of the way you went on when they found out Charlie Thorpe had been stealing the money he used to spend so freely for theater tickets and things. The way you stood up for Charlie and insisted that it was all a mistake made the rest of us laugh."

"They never proved it. I never believed a word of it. Some people believe everything they hear that is bad about a man, no matter how good he has been to them. Charlie Thorpe was a nice boy. I was awfully sorry for him. I hope it will all come out right some day, be-

cause I don't believe he was guilty at all, poor fellow."

"Oh, they are all nice to you," retorted Madge, standing up to go. "I never heard you say a bad word about any one yet; not even about a woman. The way you begged off for Annie Ordway used to amuse me immensely. We thought at one time you were going to call on her. She would have been a good match for your friend Mr. Maxwell, apparently."

"Now, Madge," said Helen, rather sharply, "I do not want to hear anything more on that subject."

"Oh, I hope you will hear from him soon. Perhaps he will call, or write, or something. I must be off now," and with that she swept out of the room.

CHAPTER XX

SOMEHOW or other, that conversation with Madge rankled. It had brought forth in the words of another an idea which Helen Ohlstrom had been trying to hide from her own thoughts; the idea that Hardy Maxwell might be a married man.

For the hundredth time she went over all the possibilities that might prevent him from communicating with her; but in spite of herself she had to confess that only two of them offered a reasonable explanation. He had met with an accident that prevented him from writing, or he had been trifling with her.

If it were an accident and he was not killed, he surely could not be unconscious all this time, and she should be the first person he would think of on coming to himself. If he were killed, she would have known of it somehow, surely.

She had heard of men that simply led girls on, just to amuse themselves. Madge had confessed to several experiences of that sort. If Hardy Maxwell had been trifling with her, why had he stopped when he did? It must be because he was a married man, and knew that she

would inevitably find it out in time through her relatives in England. Whether he was married or not, his conduct was certainly most dishonorable if he had simply dropped her, as Madge insisted. She could not believe it; he was so handsome and tall and strong, she told herself, as if that were sufficient answer to every doubt.

On Thursday morning she could bear the uncertainty no longer. Putting on her things, she went out with the idea of finding a telephone pay-station and calling up the club where the men in charge ought to know something about Maxwell.

In answer to her question they were sorry to say that they did not know any Mr. Maxwell there. Was he a member? No? Only a visitor? Please wait a moment.

There was no such name on the visitors' list. Probably the lady was mistaken in the name of the club.

She did not think so, but it might be possible. Good-by.

The result of her first inquiry was so unexpected that Helen felt completely prostrated. She went out into the air as quickly as possible, and tried to think what to do next. After walk-

ing about for nearly an hour, she determined to try again, and to telephone to Mr. Douglas.

Mr. Douglas had gone abroad. Very sorry.

After these two failures, Helen did not like to call up any one else, and the only one she could think of was Mr. Hartley. He had known her father, and it might be awkward if he recognized her name. That seemed the only hope left, when she recollected Dr. Ramie. How clearly all those names came back to her! How sharply she recalled that after-dinner story during her walk with Hardy Maxwell. How well he looked that day, and how admiringly he had gazed at her as they kept step together over the sand. And once, she remembered, he had walked so close to her that she could feel the pressure of his arm against her own. So vivid was the recollection that she almost felt him still at her side.

With her memory running back over the happy past, she forgot all about the telephone until she had walked a long way. Then she seemed to awake as from a dream, and remembered the hard reality of her errand. She stopped, turned back, and after finding a convenient telephone, called up Dr. Ramie's office.

It was not the doctor's office hour. He would not be in again until late that evening.

There was nothing to do now but to turn to Mr. Hartley. She must find out something.

"A lady on the 'phone, asking if you are in," was James McBride's report, a few minutes later.

Hartley almost jumped out of his chair. "A lady? Asking for me? No, no! Tell her I'm not in town. Tell her I've gone to Europe—Florida—Bermuda—anything you like. Say I won't be back this winter."

McBride could not help smiling at the earnestness of the repudiation of the first call in a woman's voice that he could recollect having come over the telephone since he had been in the service of Mr. George Hartley. But instead of repeating his superior's emphatic message, he answered with his softest and most agreeable voice that he was very sorry, but Mr. Hartley was not in the city.

Would he return soon?

He was not expected for some time. Could they do anything for her?

The voice at the other end of the wire was particularly attractive, and had a peculiar fascination for McBride, who was not averse to continuing the conversation.

Did he happen to know Mr. Maxwell's present address?

Putting his hand over the transmitter, McBride propounded this question to his superior, who was standing by, evidently wishing the connection to be cut off as soon as possible, but still curious to know who it was.

"Maxwell? No. Never heard of him," and then to himself: "This is one of those traps, sure as I live! Wants me to ask if she doesn't mean Maynard, so she gets off a name something like it." Then he added aloud: "No. Tell her no, and shut her off."

In spite of this peremptory instruction, McBride concluded the conversation as deliberately and as gracefully as possible, with many regrets that he could not be of service to the owner of the voice. He even went so far as to make the unpardonable mistake of asking her to call him up again if he could do anything for her. This made Hartley so angry that he snatched the receiver and hung it up himself.

"Cut those women out in future, James," he commanded. "They're no good. Beggars; all of them. They used to be book agents; now they're simply beggars."

"Not exactly the voice of a book agent or a beggar, sir," remarked McBride quietly. "Quite a nice voice, in fact. Shouldn't wonder if she were a very pretty girl."

"You young fellows think every girl you can't see must be a beauty," rejoined Hartley with a scowl. "The world is full of Margery Daws at your time of life. Come, let's get down to business on these letters. I'll have that telephone taken out if it gives much more trouble."

CHAPTER XXI

THE next morning at breakfast, Mr. Ohlstrom seemed to find the paper more than usually interesting. He was in the habit of standing it up in front of his plate and reading between bites. Occasionally he would clear his throat and read an item aloud, but his selections were seldom of any interest to his family. They were usually political or financial news, or connected with some of the enterprises in which he had been engaged during his active life.

"I see they had a meeting of the directors of the Tyler Trust Company yesterday, and elected George Hartley president." Then he read: " 'Mr. Hartley's views of the proper management of trust companies were listened to with profound attention, and the soundness of his financial principles called forth strong commendation from all those that heard him.' " After a pause he observed: "Smart fellow, that Hartley."

"Isn't he the president of the Hardware Trust or something of that kind, papa?" Helen asked.

"That's he. Tricky dog, but smart. His views of finance can be expressed in one sentence, 'Get the other fellow's money.' "

Mr. Ohlstrom read other items, but Helen was not listening. She was thinking about that conversation over the telephone. Mr. Hartley must have been in the city yesterday; was perhaps in his office at the very moment that she called him up. "Tricky dog!" What did that mean? Why had he denied himself to her? She had not given any name. Who was the pleasant-voiced man who had answered the telephone?

That morning, about twelve o'clock, McBride rose from the dignity of his desk in the private office, with the intention of going into the sanctum to ask Mr. Hartley a question. Happening to glance through the half-open door which led to the outer office, he saw a remarkably handsome girl standing at the desk. At the same instant the boy put his head in and handed McBride a card.

"A lady to see Mr. Hartley, sir."

Before McBride had time to read the name, the girl followed the card into the room.

"I am Miss Ohlstrom," she said briefly, and smiled at the handsome young fellow that stood blushing before her. McBride instantly recog-

nized the voice that he had heard over the telephone the day before. He was so taken aback, not only by her sudden appearance, but by the vision of loveliness that she revealed with her rosy cheeks and flashing eyes, that he was absolutely speechless.

"What can I do for you?" he managed to stammer, motioning her to a chair; an invitation which she pretended not to see.

"I should like to see Mr. Hartley for a moment."

At this announcement McBride fairly staggered. Was he to continue his rôle and to say that he was Mr. Hartley, after having told her over the telephone the day before that Mr. Hartley was not in town? Or should he call Mr. Hartley from the inner room? The sudden recollection of the scene at his end of the wire the day before vetoed his second thought. Instead of answering immediately, he stepped behind her and softly closed the door leading to the outer office. A rapid glance at the door of the sanctum assured him that the outer sound door was wide open, so that Mr. Hartley could hear all that passed, if he chose to listen. McBride found himself wishing that his employer and his inner office were both at the bottom of the sea.

All this passed while he closed the door. Pulling himself together, he laid the papers in his hand upon the desk, and said quietly, with his most graceful bow: "I am Mr. Hartley." As he spoke he motioned once more to the chair at the side of the desk.

The look of unconcealed astonishment on the girl's face made him blush. He smiled as assuringly as he could, and added: "Is there anything I can do for you?"

That was the second time he had said it. The tone as well as the words struck her at once. It was the same voice that had spoken to her over the telephone the day before. "Tricky dog" were the words that kept running through her head. "What a handsome fellow!" she could not help adding to herself.

"It was Mr. *George* Hartley I wished to see," she said, as she suddenly recollected that Mr. Hartley must be a much older man. At the same time she sank into the indicated chair.

"I am Mr. George Hartley."

She did not know exactly what to say, when it occurred to her that this might be Mr. George Hartley, Junior, if there were such a person. His manner was certainly very polite and encouraging. Why should she not come at once to the point?

"I hope you will pardon me for intruding upon you," she began, "but I am very anxious about a mutual friend who brought letters to us from England. We fear he has met with some accident, as we have heard or seen nothing of him for a week. I refer to Mr. Hardy Maxwell."

Again McBride was very sorry, but he had never heard of the gentleman. At the same moment, he was conscious that the door leading to the sanctum, which was directly behind Miss Ohlstrom, was opened about an inch. Mr. Hartley was evidently listening.

Hartley was more than listening. He was getting terribly nervous, and running over in his mind a thousand schemes to put a stop to the conversation in the other room before it got too far. He perceived a return of the trap that had been set for him over the telephone. He thought the female detective had arrived.

"Have you not heard his name mentioned?" she said, still thinking McBride might be Mr. Hartley's son.

"Never. I am sure none of my family ever heard of such a person." He was quoting what Mr. Hartley had said the day before.

"Why, you astonish me," she almost gasped. "I mean the friend of Mr. Maynard."

"I never heard of Mr. Maynard," McBride answered quietly, although he felt that he was putting his foot into it somehow.

The door of the sanctum opened fully a foot, and without looking in that direction, McBride was conscious that Hartley was shaking his fist at him, and was greatly excited about something. A casual glance, a moment later, was instantly answered by Hartley's making motions with both hands which clearly indicated that he wished his confidential clerk to throw the young lady out.

Helen stood up presently, inserting both her hands in her muff. She looked McBride straight in the face as he rose with her. The pretty mouth was now a thin red line.

"You will pardon me, sir, but I do not think you are Mr. Hartley, or you would know both those gentlemen well." The inner door of the sanctum shut quickly as she stood up. McBride was strongly tempted to walk over and shut the sound door as well; but he feared it would attract Miss Ohlstrom's attention to the inner room.

"Why, really, you see," he stammered, "I know so many people, it is just possible that I do not recognize the names for the moment. Perhaps I have not seen the gentlemen you

mention for some time. Perhaps I am in the habit of calling them by their first names."

He did not know exactly what he was saying. He wished only that Mr. Hartley was in Guinea. Then he would come right out with the truth and have done with this farce. Here was a beautiful girl, standing up and talking to him so frankly, and he was lying to her like a horse-thief.

"I really do not understand matters," she said, "unless it is that you are only Mr. Hartley's son."

"Of course I am," he said, instantly grasping at the straw. "You surely didn't imagine I was the president?"

The sweetness of the smile she gave him as she sat down again was worth a thousand lies. He could not help acknowledging to himself that he had never seen such a beauty. She was just what his fancy had always pictured the perfect girl to be, only more so. He was so intent on looking at her that he entirely forgot what her errand was.

Had Hartley known what was passing through the mind of his confidential clerk, he would probably have reasoned that Miss Right had arrived; but just at that moment Hartley had troubles of his own, and was clenching his

fists and muttering curses to himself, as he realized that the interview in the other room was to be continued. If that girl did not go, he would have a stroke of apoplexy.

"Well, Mr. Hartley," Helen began, not knowing that the door behind her was slowly opening again, "Mr. Maxwell and Mr. Maynard are friends of your father's, and I wish very much that you would ask your father if he knows anything of Mr. Maxwell's present whereabouts, because we are very anxious about him."

"Maxwell!" exclaimed Mr. Hartley to himself, in the other room. "Another name for that fellow, I suppose. And this must be the girl that Doremus is after, and Fletcher has not written to her yet, eh? On my word!" pulling the door open a little wider, and forgetting his excitement for the moment as he took a good look at the figure in the chair—"my word, but she's a stunner! Johnson's right about that!"

McBride came to himself, as he realized that the girl was waiting for an answer to her question.

"Certainly! I shall tell him all about it. I mean, I shall ask Mr. Hartley—my father, I mean, about the matter when I see him. And,

and—where shall I send you word?" This was said with a most engaging smile.

"Is there no way you can telephone and ask him?"

Helen did not like the idea of giving her address. She had hesitated about giving her right name; but as Mr. Hartley, Junior, had not recognized it, it did not matter.

"I am afraid I could not reach him by telephone," McBride answered very positively. He was determined not to lose this opportunity of getting her address. The bare possibility of never seeing her again already alarmed him. "Are you quite sure that he knows the address?" he asked.

"Oh, I think so. You see, I telephoned to the club and asked about Mr. Maxwell, and was very much astonished to find they did not know any such person. I suppose I must have made a mistake in the name of the club, or something. But I know your father will be able to tell you something, because they were all together at dinner at Green's several times lately. They had some funny sort of a bet—about robbing a bank or something—that Mr. Maxwell seemed to be very much interested in. Interested in the bet, I mean; not the bank,"

she added hastily, seeing the expression of surprise on the young man's face.

Hartley was in a state of collapse. He saw that if this girl was allowed to go on, she would tell McBride the whole story, and then everybody would know it, and he might as well surrender to the police at once. He opened the door wide enough to beckon frantically to his clerk; but McBride found it convenient at that moment to concentrate his gaze upon the face of his fair visitor, who was smiling very sweetly just then, and looking her best.

"Yes, I think it was Mr. Douglas and Mr. Hartley who made the bet," Helen went on. "Oh, it was some dreadful amount that Mr. Maxwell mentioned. But I suppose your father has told you the joke already?"

"I heard a part of it only," said McBride with a smile, adding to himself: "What a liar I am all at once!"

Before either of them could say another word, Hartley had determined to cross the Rubicon. He must stop this tête-à-tête or burst a blood vessel. He opened the door of the sanctum with a cough, and conscious that he was very red in the face, strode into the room with some papers in his hand.

Without apparently noticing Miss Ohlstrom's

presence, he approached McBride, who instinctively rose to offer his chair.

"Your father left these papers for you, Mr. Hartley," he said, abruptly. "I think they need your attention before you go to lunch," pulling out his watch and glancing at it. Then, turning to the young woman, whose appearance seemed to make a marked improvement in his manner, as soon as he got a good look at her face, he said quite politely: "I trust you will pardon this intrusion, but Mr. Hartley's instructions were to give these papers to his son the moment they were ready."

As she rose from her chair, McBride stepped back, but the older man stood there transfixed. "On my word," he was saying to himself, "but Johnson's right; she *is* a stunner."

She was half way out of the door before McBride recovered himself and rushed forward to hold it open for her. Then he followed her into the outer office, and opened that door for her. From there he followed her into the corridor, and saw her safely into the elevator. Then he accompanied her downstairs in the elevator, without his hat, and all the way he was chattering, he did not know what about. He had but one idea in his head: to get per-

mission to call on her, and to take her what news he could about Mr. Maxwell.

Helen could not disguise the fact that she was pleased at McBride's marked attention. She was aware that she had made a very decided impression. And then he was so nice about it when he insisted on bringing the coveted information to her personally, if she would be good enough to allow him to do so. There might be so much more to say than it would be convenient to write, etc. So finally she gave him her address, and smiled her sweetest smile as he held the outer door open for her to pass into the street.

When the young man and Hartley were face to face again a minute later, they looked at each other in silence for a second. Hartley expected that he would have to make some unpleasant explanations, or tell some more lies. McBride was the first to speak.

"Isn't that a peach? By the great horn spoon!" he cried, slapping his leg with his right hand and smiling broadly. His eyes snapped with pleasure as he saw that Hartley evidently agreed.

"She's a stunner!" assented the older man. "What did you say her name was?" He picked up her card from the desk. "Miss Ohlstrom,

eh?" Hartley threw the card down again, and waited for his confidential man to ask for information about Maxwell. Strange to say, McBride seemed to have entirely forgotten that part of the conversation with his visitor. He could do nothing but talk about the girl. It soon became evident to Hartley that James was badly smitten. In order to get away himself, he suggested to McBride that it was time for him to go to his luncheon.

McBride took his hat and coat and went out, saying he would return in an hour. A janitor who was mopping up one end of the corridor looked up in astonishment at seeing the young man doing a two-step with great energy all by himself, humming the Washington Post March and holding the tails of his overcoat in his finger tips the while.

Going down in the elevator, McBride took her card out of his pocket and jotted down her address upon it. A friend met him on the street, and asked him to go to lunch with him. He declined rather abruptly. He wanted to be alone with his thoughts of Miss Ohlstrom. It was not until he was seated at a table that the smile suddenly left his face. How about having given her a false name? He felt a sudden sense of dizziness as he put his hand to his head

and bit his lip. "I told that girl more lies in half an hour than I have told since last Christmas," he said to himself. "That was a bad beginning, giving her a wrong name."

All the afternoon he could think of nothing but how to straighten that difficulty out. He felt ashamed of himself; and he realized that it would place him in a very bad light with her. Moreover, Miss Ohlstrom probably would be chagrined to find that he was nothing but a clerk. "Dash it all!" he said to himself. "Why didn't I call in Hartley at once, instead of getting myself into this mess? The finest girl I ever met in my life, and this is the way I start out with her! Dash it!"

It was nearly four o'clock when Hartley took his hat and gloves, and announced that he was going home. He observed that McBride had been very much preoccupied all the afternoon, and had quite lost his gay spirits of the morning. As Hartley pulled on his glove, he stopped a moment, and looked at his clerk, as if expecting some question.

"Anything more to-day, James?"

"Nothing, sir. Thank you."

As Hartley was about to close the door behind him, he said quietly: "By the way, James, I don't know any such person as Mr. Maxwell.

Never heard the name even. That thing's all a mistake. Must be some other Hartley she's looking for. Good-day."

When he got out into the corridor he smiled. "I did not say I didn't know Maynard, but he will think I meant I didn't know either of them," he assured himself. "Now, if that girl gets confidential with Doremus and tells him that she called on me, and describes my son to him, all that lying will be wasted. But I am following advice of counsel. I told the truth about one thing anyway. I don't know any such name as Maxwell."

CHAPTER XXII

AFTER thinking the matter over carefully McBride concluded that he would be more likely to find Miss Ohlstrom at home on Sunday afternoon than at any other time. It was hard to wait so long, but the interval was devoted to rosy dreams of another chat with her, and of the cementing of an acquaintance that was going to be something more than an acquaintance some day, or his reading of his own horoscope was sadly at fault. He had nothing to tell her about Maxwell; but what did that matter? He let his imagination run absurdly on, building castles. They would have a nice chat, and he would get permission to call again, on some pretense or other. He would find out who her friends were and be formally introduced, and then he would take her to the theater, and to drive; he would see her almost every day. Hartley was quite right about one thing: McBride would be an ardent lover when he met Miss Right.

Sunday afternoon came, and after making a very careful toilet, and trying to look his best,

although he was really very nervous, McBride went to the address which Helen had given him, and rang the bell. He had prepared a card on which he had written, "Mr. George Hartley, Jr.," and which he handed to the maid who opened the door. He thought it better to keep that name until he explained matters personally. Miss Ohlstrom would not know who it was if he sent up his right name.

Miss Ohlstrom would be down in a minute. In a minute! How his heart beat! In a minute he was to be face to face with her again. Then he would refresh his memory with a look at her face; he would study the features that he had forgotten. The general impression was there, but the details were wanting.

There was no mistaking that figure as she swept into the room. She appeared glad to see him; but she did not extend her hand. She did not even ask him to be seated. She pulled up the shade a little, and made some remark about not wanting a light yet. That was all. He felt chilled, somehow, at this reception.

Helen was looking her best. The worry of the last week had been stopped by the prospect of hearing something definite about Maxwell, and her face looked brighter for it. McBride's glance of admiration was unmistak-

able as he stood there, hat in hand, simply devouring her with his eyes; but he was evidently nervous and ill at ease. He was suddenly recalled to himself by seeing her glance at the card he had sent up, which she now held in her hand.

"Miss Ohlstrom, I—I want to make a confession to you, Miss Ohlstrom. Dash it all! I'm not Mr. Hartley at all. My name is James McBride," he blurted out.

"Indeed!" she answered very quietly, lifting her eyebrows a trifle, perhaps, but without betraying the expected surprise.

"Yes. I'm Mr. Hartley's confidential man—in the office, you know," he stammered.

"My father told me last night that Mr. Hartley had no grown-up children." Her voice was very calm and business-like.

"That was Mr. Hartley that came into the room while you were there, you know. You see, it was this way——"

"But he addressed you as Mr. Hartley," she interrupted, looking very grave. "I really don't understand such things; but I suppose they are considered necessary in some offices."

"Well, you see, Miss Ohlstrom, Mr. Hartley is bothered to death with all sorts of people, this time of year, and they distract his atten-

tion from important business. So he asked me to represent him. And then you came in, and——"

"I really don't care to hear your explanations, or your reasons for conducting your business in your own way," she said quickly. "If you will be good enough to give me any information you have with regard to Mr. Maxwell, I shall be grateful to you. It would be extremely awkward for me to explain your presence here should my parents return, Mr.—— Let me see; what is your name now?"

What is your name now? Great heavens! And this was the Sunday afternoon visit that he had lived on the hopes of for the last forty-eight hours! He could have wept for very humiliation.

"Dash it all, Miss Ohlstrom, it's not my fault," he cried. "I have to obey orders. I came up here to set myself straight with you, and to beg your pardon for having deceived you. My name is James McBride. I——"

"Really, Mr. McBride," Helen interrupted, "I fail to see any necessity for your setting yourself straight, as you call it. It is no concern of mine what name you choose to assume. If you will be good enough to give me the information which I presume it was the object of your visit

to bring, I will trouble you to forget that we ever met, and to leave the house at once."

"Why, really, Miss Ohlstrom, this is unjust, as well as unkind. It is not my fault that I had to tell you I was Mr. Hartley." The poor fellow was red with mortification.

"Pardon me, Mr. McBride. I do not wish to hear any excuses. Have you Mr. Maxwell's present address, or any news of him?"

Something in her manner and tone made his blood boil. Drawing himself up to his full height, his eyes flashing with sudden anger, he blurted out:

"Mr. Hartley says he never heard of any such persons as Maynard or Maxwell. He says you are mistaken in calling upon him. It must be some other Mr. Hartley you are thinking about."

Even as he spoke, the young man felt himself becoming more angry every moment. He could not trust himself further, so he bowed stiffly and backed toward the door, with a very curt, "I wish you good-afternoon." The tones of his voice were very different from those that went over the telephone wire a few days before.

"One moment, please," she gasped, [illegible] toward him with both hands outstretch[illegible] stood there, close to the door, motic[illegible]

eyes still blazing with wounded pride. She passed one hand over her forehead, half dazed. This tissue of falsehoods seemed to make her dizzy. Not the right Mr. Hartley! Never heard of Maynard or Maxwell! It was incredible. What did it all mean?

"One moment, please," she repeated. "You must be mistaken. Mr. George Hartley is the president of the Hardware Trust, is he not?"

"Yes," he almost snapped.

"And a friend of Mr. Douglas?"

"Not at all. They are very far from friends, for business reasons. But you will excuse me. I must be going. Your parents might return." He said it almost with a sneer, making another step backward.

"Just one moment, please," she pleaded, putting out her hand as if to hold him. She was terrified to think that her last chance to learn anything of her lover was escaping her. Something in her action, something in her look, touched the man for the moment. What a beauty she was, after all, he thought. What is there in a pretty girl, just on the verge of tears, that will make a man act like a fool? On the impulse of the moment he forgot his wounded pride, and grasped the outstretched hand and held it; held it firmly, in spite of her

effort to withdraw it. He took a step toward her, and looked her straight in the eyes.

"Now listen, Miss Ohlstrom. I came up here to set myself straight with you, and to apologize for having deceived you. Business may be business; but, dash it all! I felt like a beastly cad about lying to you that way, and then having to come here and send you up a false name. I thought you would forgive me, and that then I might be of some assistance to you. I could not help feeling that you were the sort of girl that one had to be sincere with, even before I saw you; when I first heard the sound of your voice." She got her hand free, but he went on: "I hated to think that if you should ever meet me, or see me, and find out that I was not Mr. Hartley, that you would look upon me as a lying cad. Whether I ever see you again or not, I want your good opinion."

After a moment of silence he continued, in a tone of less assurance:

"I cannot do any more than acknowledge that I did wrong. Now won't you forgive me?"

Helen seemed in doubt what to say, but she was evidently softening. On the inspiration of the moment McBride said softly:

"If we were friends, we could get to the bot-

tom of these lies about Mr. Maxwell. If he is anywhere on earth, I will find him for you. There is my hand on it."

It was the last speech that told. He saw that. The earnestness of his manner—the straightforward honest look in his face—overcame her hesitation. She put out her hand with a smile, but the grasp that he gave it made her flinch.

Still, she did not feel quite at ease. She was sorry he had made that avowal about liking her. And then she kept thinking of the possible return of her parents. What would they say if they found her talking to this unknown man? The more quickly she could get rid of him the better, she thought, but she would like to clear up this mystery about Mr. Hartley.

"I am quite sure that I made no mistake about the Mr. Hartley that knew him," she began. "There is no other George Hartley that is president of the Hardware Trust, I suppose?" McBride shook his head very positively. "Then he knows both Mr. Maxwell and Mr. Maynard perfectly. He dined with them several times lately. Of that I am positive."

"There must be some mistake."

"I cannot see how it is possible. Mr. Max-

well told me the whole story. Mr. Hartley and Mr. Douglas were at the dinner——"

"But Mr. Douglas and Mr. Hartley are not friendly. Mr. Douglas caught Mr. Hartley in some stock transaction last year, and they have not spoken since."

"There! Now I know I am right; because Mr. Maxwell told me they had had some sort of unpleasant business relations, but it was not known to their host until they arrived. It was their nagging at each other after the dinner that led to the bet, you know."

"What was the bet about? Do you know?"

"I did not understand it exactly. That is, I don't remember the details. But some one was to rob a bank or something, and then hide. Then Mr. Hartley and Mr. Douglas had a bet of some tremendous amount that the police could not find the thief."

"But did they make the bet, or was it all talk?"

"I think they made the bet. It was at Dr. Ramie's dinner party, you know."

"Dr. Ramie!" he exclaimed. "Do you know if the bet was ten thousand dollars?"

"Yes, I think it was."

"Then you are right about Mr. Hartley. I made out a check for Dr. Ramie for ten thou-

sand dollars last Monday week. I suppose he was the stakeholder."

"But Mr. Maxwell and Mr. Maynard were both at the dinner. What is Mr. Hartley's object in saying he does not know either of them?" she asked. "They dined together again after that. Why does he deny the acquaintance? Is it because I am the person that wants the information, I wonder? I suppose he heard my name that day at the office."

"Why should the information be concealed from you particularly?"

Helen blushed and looked confused. She did not like to give form to the thought that was passing through her mind. If Hardy Maxwell were unfaithful; if it were his intention never to see her again, perhaps he had asked his friends—— But no! She could not think such a thing of him. She looked up at McBride, who was evidently awaiting an answer to his last question.

"You see," she faltered, looking down and turning her face away slightly, "I think I have a right to know what has happened to Mr. Maxwell, because—because he and I——"

She stopped and blushed slightly, as if unwilling to finish the sentence. It was quite unnecessary. He divined what she was loath to

say. She was engaged, and all those rosy dreams of his were vain.

She read his thoughts, and the uneasiness of a few minutes before returned. "If I was not singled out," she demanded, "why does Mr. Hartley deny his acquaintance with Mr. Maxwell?"

"Perhaps Mr. Maxwell is not a desirable person to know."

She drew herself up like a flash. "I wish you to understand, sir, that Mr. Maxwell came here with the best of introductions, from my uncle, and that I shall not permit you to asperse his character."

"I beg your pardon," he said humbly, seeing his mistake. "You see—you know. I cannot think of any other reason. Please don't get angry with me. Let me talk the matter over with Mr. Hartley. I will find out the truth about the matter to-morrow. Then won't you let me call and tell you what I learn?"

"I should much prefer that you would write. I do not like the idea of your coming here when you are not an acquaintance."

He did not seem to relish the tone in which this was said. It conveyed no wish that he were an acquaintance. Both stood for a moment or two looking at nothing; both thinking of the

same thing—some excuse for another meeting. He to continue the acquaintance, she to gain further information about her absent lover.

"I have it!" he exclaimed, at last. "Won't you let me send you tickets for ladies' day at the Athletic Club? I am one of the reception committee, you know. It is on Tuesday afternoon. There might be some mutual friend there to introduce us."

"I do not like the idea of making such an appointment with a stranger," she said hesitatingly, "but I am really very curious to hear Mr. Hartley's explanation."

"I will send the tickets to-night. The moment I get home," he urged hastily. "Please try to come. I will have news for you. We will find him. You know I have promised you that," and without trusting himself to say anything further, he took his leave.

CHAPTER XXIII

MR. HARTLEY called up Dr. Ramie next day and asked him to dine at Green's that evening. "It's about as convenient a place as any," Hartley said. "I'm going to bring Groscup with me. Douglas' lawyer, you know. We want to talk over things with you. I'm getting sick of this business about that bet. It's getting on my nerves."

"Why, what's the matter now? I thought the whole thing had blown over nicely."

"I don't want to talk over the telephone. But I got another shock to-day, that shows me the whole town is getting on to it. The only ones that are asleep on the job are the police. Come to-night at eight, and I'll tell you all about it."

That things were getting on Hartley's nerves was very evident from his conduct that evening. Nothing in the place or on the bill of fare suited him, and he seemed inclined to fly into a rage about the merest trifles. Seeing there was no mustard on the table, he called to a waiter who was leisurely folding napkins at the other end

of the room: "Bring me some mustard here, will you?"

The waiter drew himself up and turned his impassive face in their direction. "Ze waiter, he come quick," was all he said.

"I don't want a waiter, I want mustard. There it is on the table beside you." He rose as if to get it himself, when the waiter entered with a tray. Mr. Hartley turned on him. "What's the matter with this restaurant lately? Your waiters all dummies?" The waiter was very sorry. He tried to pacify Mr. Hartley. That tall fellow was only an omnibus, he said, and was not allowed to wait on the table.

Then Mr. Hartley knocked over his wine glass, which he regarded as a bad omen, and tried to blame the waiter for it. The poor waiter assured him that it was not unlucky. "Some gentlemen, they break champagne glasses for luck," he said. All these things seemed to add to Mr. Hartley's bad humor, until finally the doctor said he would have to prescribe for him.

"What you want, Hartley, is the rest cure. You had better go to Florida for a week or two."

Mr. Groscup objected. He thought that the matters Mr. Hartley had come to talk over re-

quired him to keep his eye on the situation at home, for a few days at least.

After a good cigar and several glasses of wine, Hartley became a little more mellow, and prepared to give the doctor a history of his troubles, Groscup being an attentive listener.

"This business of Maxwell's is getting too much for me," he began.

"Maxwell?" interrupted the doctor, raising his eyebrows. "To whom do you refer?"

"I didn't mean Maxwell. I'm getting so ratty I forget names." After a moment's drumming on the table, as if to recollect himself, he went on: "Fletcher, I mean, of course. This business of Fletcher's is getting to be a nightmare."

"Why, I thought it was almost forgotten; by the outside public, that is."

"By the public, perhaps; but not by other people. That girl that Doremus was going to watch——" Hartley caught himself this time, and took a big swallow of wine. Then he struck a match, although his cigar had not gone out; and having gained time enough to collect his thoughts, he started afresh.

"You know this Maxwell—hang it all! I mean Fletcher—had a girl. Stunner, upon my word! Good taste in girls, he had. Well, this

girl was getting anxious about him, not hearing from him for a week; so down she comes to my office, if you please, to inquire. Why she couldn't call you or Douglas, or some one else, I don't know; but of course I am the victim. I wasn't in at the time, so she asked James, my secretary, you know, what he knew about Maxwell—I mean Fletcher." The doctor smiled every time Hartley made this slip. "So James promised to get the information for me. Following Mr. Groscup's advice, I said I had never heard the name even, and I told James not to see her again if she called. This morning it appears, she laid for him in the corridor, so as to catch him before he got into the office, and wanted to know whether he had that address for her or not. James says he told her I didn't know any such people as Maynard or Maxwell, and she went into tantrums at once and told him the whole story about the dinner, and the bet, and gave him all our names and everything, pat. Of course I had a scene with James. I lied about it as long as I could; but he had me dead on the check I sent you, doctor. I was so afraid of making a slip that I thought it best to put him off with a promise to explain things to-morrow, so that I could see you and get some advice from Gros-

cup in the meantime. I want to know what to do. I have been very careful not to give myself away so far, you know."

Groscup and the doctor looked at each other and laughed. Hartley seemed annoyed. "What's wrong now?" he queried.

"Well," remarked the lawyer dryly, "you have called Fletcher 'Maxwell' about six times this evening, and it is very evident that the name 'Maxwell' is more prominently in your mind than Fletcher. As I told you the other day, Hartley, nothing is so difficult to conceal as guilty knowledge of facts when one is obliged to talk about them. Would you mind telling us where you got the name Maxwell?"

"That's the name he gave the girl."

"And this Doremus you mentioned a while ago. I think you said he was going to watch her. Who is he?"

Mr. Hartley's wits were not ready for that explanation immediately. His confusion was very evident; but he made an effort. "Why, the girl told James that she was being shadowed, and that a man named Doremus was trying to get acquainted with her."

"I do not want to cross-examine you now, Mr. Hartley," remarked the lawyer quietly, "but I think it would be better for you to be perfectly

frank with us. You may remember that I told you hesitation in giving an answer is a sure sign that something is being held back, or that the answer has been framed to avoid the truth. I should like to know where to find this man Doremus, and also to have the name and address of the girl. If this matter comes into court, we should know all the facts."

"Oh, hang Doremus and the girl"; pouring out another glass of wine; "I'm sick of the whole business. I want to know if there is not some way to clear the whole thing up. Why can't we make a clean breast of it, and tell the police all we know and have that fellow caught and tried? We haven't done anything wrong. I am sick of all this worry."

"No one seems to be worrying about it but yourself, Mr. Hartley," remarked the doctor. "I have no bother. Douglas is enjoying himself."

"Yes," put in Groscup; "I was thinking of cabling to Douglas to come home as soon as he pleased. I thought the whole thing had blown over; but this puts a new aspect on the case. The first thing we know, that girl will be going to the police and asking them to find 'Maxwell,' as she calls him. That is, if she is

sufficiently interested in him. Where did he pick her up, I wonder?"

"Brought letters to her family from the old country, James says. But they're forgeries, of course. That's one of the dodges of that Ardmore gang, you know. They always get good introductions to some woman to use as a tool to circulate their counterfeits."

"And pray what has the Ardmore gang to do with this case?" demanded the lawyer, evidently astonished at the connection of ideas.

"Oh, nothing!" said Hartley quickly, taking another swallow of wine. "I just happened to think it was probably a common dodge among criminals, and having heard the Ardmore gang used it, probably Maxwell used it."

"But Maxwell is not a criminal, if he is Fletcher."

"No, that's so. But of course he reads the papers; and he probably read that the Ardmore gang used that trick to get acquainted with nice girls."

"That would mean that he forged letters; and it would also prove him to be the originator, not the imitator; because he must have been acquainted with her long before the Ardmore gang got into the papers. I don't quite see the connection"; and the lawyer looked at

the doctor, who was simply smiling to himself and apparently enjoying the confusion into which Hartley was plunged.

"Well," exclaimed Hartley suddenly, "let's cut that all out! We're wasting time. What I want to know is, why we can't go to the police with the whole story and sleep nights."

Groscup smiled. "The first step they would take would be to put the whole lot of you in jail, and to institute extradition proceedings for my client, Mr. Douglas. You gentlemen would be obliged to confess that you deliberately instigated Fletcher to rob Maynard; hired him, in fact, as you promised to pay him for the job. While I have my own theory of the truth of the case, the police theory would probably be that there were some hitch in carrying out the original plan of the robbery, and that Fletcher was determined to have the money, and did not stop at violence. After you had all been put through the third degree to find out what you knew about Fletcher's antecedents, this girl you speak of would be arrested, and you would probably lie in jail until her letters of introduction were traced. I am very much afraid, Mr. Hartley, if what you tell us is true, that the police will be informed quickly enough without your hurrying matters. It seems to me that the

first step should be to see that young lady and muzzle her, regardless of expense. Have you any idea of her class? Would money be an object?"

Mr. Hartley was too dazed by the lawyer's portrayal of the possible consequences of recent events to answer. The doctor repeated the question.

"The girl! Oh, she's a stunner! James is quite gone on her. Miss Ohlstrom is the name she gave; probably false. Have no idea where she lives, though. Johnson knows all about that."

"And pray who is Johnson?"

Hartley had to take a long pull at the wine before he could answer this question. "Well, to tell you the truth, boys—of course this is sub rosa; because I'm a married man, you know—but I took quite a fancy to the young lady myself. Stunning figure, you know, and all that. So I just had one of the men in the office, Johnson, follow her home to see where she lived and find out what she was"; and he winked at them knowingly.

"When was this?"

"The first time she came to the office."

"And what did Johnson discover?"

"He has the name and address all right, I

believe. Fact is, I didn't ask him about it particularly, not being in the humor for that sort of adventure just at present."

"Would you mind sending Johnson round to my office the first thing in the morning?"

"Certainly," was the prompt response, Hartley making up his mind that he could telephone that Johnson had not come down yet, or was sick, or had resigned, or something. He would have some excuse before the morning.

The waiter put his head in the door to say that Mr. Hartley's carriage was waiting.

"Then there's nothing for it but to keep mum," he remarked, standing up as if to go.

"And to keep other people mum, which is much more important now. It seems to me that everything depends on this Miss Ohlstrom. Women are awful tattlers."

"Looks that way to me," remarked the doctor, rather ambiguously.

"Well, I'm off. Good-night," and Hartley moved toward the door. "I suppose the best thing I can tell James to-morrow is, that I met Maxwell so seldom that I had forgotten the name, and that I don't know anything about him."

"As you never met Maxwell as Maxwell, why not say you never heard of him, and stick

to it? But don't forget Johnson the first thing in the morning, and be sure he has that address with him," were Groscup's parting words.

After the sound of the retreating steps on the stairs had ceased, the lawyer closed the door. The two men looked at each other and laughed.

"Awful liar," was the lawyer's comment. "But he knows more than he tells. Nasty complication, that girl. She is probably stuck on Fletcher, and women are awfully hard to manage when they think any one is trying to keep them from their lovers. She will have the whole detective squad about our ears in twenty-four hours if we don't head her off. All that is keeping her back now is waiting for information from Mr. Hartley's clerk."

"Looks that way," said the doctor, knocking the ashes from his cigar. He did not seem particularly worried about the matter. "None of my funeral, though, I suppose," he continued, "unless the stakeholder is an accessory before the fact, as you call it."

"You certainly have a guilty knowledge of the facts."

"I also have a knowledge of the fact that Fletcher is not suspected of anything yet. I listened to all that was said here to-night, and I infer that his friend Miss Ohlstrom cannot

have been aware that it was he that was to commit the robbery, or she would also know that he was to hide himself. That is clear, is it not?"

"Now you are talking, doctor. You are a charming contrast to Hartley, who evidently feels guilty about something that we do not understand. He is scared to death."

"I cannot see," continued the doctor, "why we should trouble ourselves about Miss Ohlstrom. The most she could do is to tell the police that a friend of hers, named Maxwell, is missing. As she is the only person, apparently, that knew him by that name, I would not give much for the clue. Still, I should like to know who she is. I never heard Fletcher mention any women friends. One thing is certain: he has cut her out since last Thursday night."

"It seems strange that he could leave her without a word of explanation, or excuse, and without writing her a line, if she thought enough of him to hunt him up by going to strange men's offices. Makes me think she's not much good. Probably some girl he picked up that he did not care to mention to his friends."

"How about the letters of introduction?"

"I think they are about as mythical as some other parts of Mr. Hartley's testimony. But when I get hold of Johnson, I will investigate the young lady for myself. There may be something in it."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE more Hartley thought over what the lawyer had said, the more frightened he became. He was so fearful that Miss Ohlstrom would send out a general alarm that he could not wait until morning, but sent a telegram that night, demanding Johnson's presence at nine the next day.

Johnson was on hand promptly, and they went into the sanctum and shut the sound-proof door behind them.

"How is Doremus getting along?" was the first question.

"Pretty slow job, that, sir," said Johnson, apologetically, twisting his slouch hat in his hands. "Expects to meet her to-morrow, though. The young lady doesn't seem to have any friends in particular, and never goes to no balls nor public things like that, you know, where a man could catch on. It's hard to work that quiet respectable kind. Personal introduction is the caper, but that takes time."

"Seems to me that a stunning girl like that ought to have lots of friends. She's built like

a statue, from the ground up, and a face like a picture."

"And may I ask where *you* seen her, sir?"

Hartley started. At first he was going to deny ever having seen her, and insist that he was only repeating Johnson's own description of her. On second thoughts, after a glance at the detective's face, he concluded that would be useless.

"To tell you the truth, Johnson, that's why I sent for you. She was here the other day."

"Oh, she was, was she! And what for?"

"She came to ask if I knew anything about Maxwell's whereabouts. She seems to have known Fletcher as Maxwell. That's another clue for you to work on."

"It seems to me, sir, asking your pardon, that it's a much more important clue that she must have known that you knew Fletcher, or she wouldn't come here."

Hartley was simply speechless. He was trying to pull some smoke from a cigar that had not been lighted yet. Johnson suggested the use of a match.

"If you knows this Fletcher, sir, or did know him, you could give us some very useful information; instead of letting us hunt round in the dark this way. I kind of thought once before,

sir, that maybe he had tried to pass some notes on you, or something like that. If you wouldn't mind telling why you want him so bad, it ought to help a lot."

Hartley did not avail himself of the suggested excuse. He wanted time to think about it. "To-morrow, Johnson, or the next day perhaps, I shall be in a position to tell you all about it; but in the meantime, I can't. All I wanted you for was to keep track of that fellow. I'm sorry you made a botch of it. But what I want now, more than anything else," stopping for a moment to pull at his cigar and to think how he should put the matter, "what I want now, more than anything else, is to get Doremus and that girl together. Now, if you will give me her address, I will guarantee to have a letter of introduction to her for Doremus three days from now. Call for it at this office."

"Suits me exactly, sir." Pulling out a dingy little note-book and thumbing over the leaves, he added: "Here it is, sir. I'll copy it for you."

Hartley took the slip of paper and glanced at it. "Miss Stewart! I thought so. The name she gave here was a fake, of course."

"Stewart's the name your man had at the

first hotel he went to, you remember, sir. What did she call herself here, sir?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter."

"But it may be useful, sir. If we know a person has used a false name, it's often handy to be able to spring it on them, sir."

"Well, she called herself Perkins here." Hartley could not see why he should give the right name, especially as the plan then forming in his mind contemplated cutting Johnson out of the whole affair at the first opportunity.

"Come here on Friday," he said at parting. If I am not in, see my man McBride, and ask him for a letter for you."

Johnson bowed himself out.

"James!"

McBride appeared at the door of the sanctum. "Send this," sealing the name and address in an envelope, after having scribbled upon it. "This is the girl's right name and her address. Johnson is sick."

"Send this over to Mr. Groscup's office at once," he directed. "No answer. And, James, I leave you in charge here after to-day. I am going to Florida by to-night's train. Get me a section when you go to luncheon; but not a word to a soul about it, remember. I shall not go to the same hotel this time. I will advise you

where to send letters. If any one comes and asks any questions, put them off. Tell them anything you like. Don't bother me with it."

In less than an hour after getting from Hartley the name and address, Groscup had sent one of his clever young men, an experienced process-server, to spy out the land. He had gone in the rôle of an agent for a photograph gallery, and had "made himself solid," as he expressed it, with the servant girl.

The address given was a boarding house, not particularly fashionable, but of the better class. Miss Stewart was not at home. Upon a promise to give the maid a bromide enlargement of a picture of herself for nothing, she had engaged herself to interest Miss Stewart in the matter. Miss Stewart was very fine-looking, and would make a splendid picture. She had a small one in her room now. Could the agent see it; just for a moment? The girl ran and got it, and the agent had a good look at it. It would be difficult to catch Miss Stewart at home, the servant said, because she was out a great deal. She dined every evening at a café on Second Avenue, because she liked the music. That was all the clerk could find out.

Upon the clerk's assurance that he could recognize her by her picture, Groscup took him

up to the café that evening. After he had hung up his coat, the lawyer went to the head-waiter and handed him a ten-dollar bill, telling him he wished to be seated at the same table with a certain lady as soon as she came in. The waiter promised to reserve a table for them, and went to do so. The two men sat in a little reception room off the hall, and as soon as Miss Stewart came up the stairs the clerk recognized her. She was tall, apparently between twenty-five and thirty, with a striking face that had almost too much character in it to be beautiful, and a figure which the clerk said would vex a saint.

As soon as he had pointed her out, the clerk left the place, and the lawyer indicated to the head-waiter that that was the lady he meant. The waiter smiled. "You are not the first, sir, on that lay; not by no means," he said. "But I tell you, sir," coming close enough to whisper, "it's no go, sir. She's as straight as a string. She used to come here with a handsome young fellow; black mustache and Vandyke. I think they are married."

"Perhaps they were lovers," ventured the lawyer.

"No, sir. We know them. When lovers have had a good dinner together, the man always slobbers over the girl a bit, and pats her

as he helps her on with her coat and all that, sir. There was none of that about them. I judge they were about five years married, and well suited to each other. A fine-looking couple, sir. But I haven't seen him for a couple of weeks. I think I could take you to that table now, sir. You see, I have been careful to fill all the others near it, so that it will look more natural."

Groscup bowed, Continental fashion, on taking his seat. The young woman smiled in return and seemed not averse to a little conversation, the opening selection of the orchestra furnishing the excuse. Her accent was decidedly English, and her voice was particularly sweet and low. She ate with the fastidious ease of a thoroughly well-bred woman. Groscup felt rather guilty as he became conscious of the fact that they were very much observed by the other diners.

Would she share a bottle of wine with him? With pleasure. Groscup felt that he was getting along famously. She was in no hurry, apparently, and begged him to smoke.

"I used to smoke cigarettes at dinner when I was in Russia," she said, "but it does not seem to be the thing in this country. We do it in England in private houses, you know."

This seemed to open the way for some chat about travel and about the people one meets. Groscup managed to mention Mr. Frank Douglas, who was then abroad and enjoying himself immensely. He watched her closely as he mentioned the name, but her face gave no sign. He managed to twist the conversation round in such a manner that he was able to bring in the names of every person connected with the affair which was uppermost in his thoughts. He even hinted at the story of the bet at the dinner. He tried every artifice known to the expert cross-examiner, hoping to trap his fair companion into a remark, a look, a recognition, a question that would betray further interest.

It was useless.

He realized that he was talking to a charming woman, with a wide knowledge of the world and its affairs, but who knew how to keep her own counsel. She did not offer to give him her name, although he mentioned his own several times. When he finally assisted her to put on her wrap, and handed her into a cab, after she had positively declined his offer to see her home and had skillfully parried all his hints about meeting her again, he lit another cigar, and went back to his table to think it over.

She was either a consummate actor, or else

she had never heard any such names in her life as Maynard, or Milton Fletcher, or Maxwell, or James Walton, or George Hartley, or Frank Douglas, or Dr. Ramie. Of one thing Groscup was quite satisfied. She had not the slightest interest in learning the present whereabouts of Maxwell.

The head-waiter stepped up to the table as the lawyer sat smoking, and made some pretense of arranging the glasses. He hoped the gentleman had enjoyed the evening. He had; very much. Thinking that he might have occasion to use the same privilege again, he pulled out another bill and slipped it into the waiter's hand. The tip seemed to inspire its recipient with a desire to do something more for him.

"I saw you were getting along all right, sir," he said. "Other gentlemen have tried it and had a good time for one evening, sir. Of course, you know, sir, we have all sorts of queer people come in here. Some we can size up quick; others is too deep for us, sir. She's the best looker we've had in here this winter. I thought I was on one night, sir, when the inspector came in here in plain clothes and took a place where he could size her up. He didn't say anything to me about that being what he was after; but I could see he was mugging her

all the time he was eating his dinner. I thought perhaps she belonged to some gang, smugglers perhaps. They're all good-lookers. Then he went out in the cloak room, and felt around until he found a loaded revolver in a heavy winter coat. I saw him take a peep at it and smile to himself. Then he put a man to watch who handed in the check for that coat, sir. Yes, sir. We have queer people come in here."

"I suppose it was her coat?"

"Sure!"

CHAPTER XXV

WHEN Helen Ohlstrom mounted the steps of the clubhouse on Tuesday afternoon, she was alone. At the door she met one of her father's old friends, whom she had heard boast about his athletic prowess in the days before there were any athletic clubs in America. He wore the badge of the reception committee, and seemed very glad to see her. He asked her if she had ever been there before, and assumed the responsibility of helping her to enjoy the afternoon.

"We must get some nice young fellow to show you round. Let me see," glancing behind him. "There's McBride talking to those girls in pink. He has been standing here for an hour. Said he expected some one. Wait until he comes back and I'll introduce you. He's a fine fellow; one of the nicest chaps in the club. I've known his family for years. Here he comes."

The old gentleman must have been pretty blind not to see that the girl he was talking to was the person for whom McBride had been watching for more than an hour. But he did

not, and the young man took the cue very nicely, and acted as if he had never seen the young lady before in his life.

"This is James McBride, Miss Ohlstrom. Let me present our coming quarter-mile champion and the future president of the club." Then slapping McBride on the back, he added: "Show her around, Jim." As they walked off, he said to a friend standing by: "That's the best-looking pair in the house to-day."

McBride took Helen all over the building, and asked her if there was anything on the program that she cared to see. He told her the swimming tank was "beastly hot and stuffy" on visitors' days, and suggested that they go up to the library, where they could have a little chat in one of the large windows and would not be likely to be overheard.

When the girl was seated in the embrasure of the window he did not seem to know exactly how to begin, but her manner betrayed that she was very impatient to hear what he had to say about the matter nearest her heart.

"You know I had an awful row with the governor at the office yesterday morning. I couldn't tell him that I had called on you, you know, so I told him you met me in the corridor," McBride began awkwardly. Sh

a little at this, so he added quickly: "You will have to forgive me for that, too. I am getting to be an awful liar since I met you; but that is the last, I hope. Just as an evidence that I can tell the truth, will you allow me to say that you are looking perfectly lovely to-day?"

While she smiled slightly and thanked him, she was clearly not in the humor for compliments and avoided meeting the eyes that were simply devouring her. For a moment she almost wished they were not alone in the library.

"But what about Mr. Maxwell?" she inquired eagerly.

McBride's face changed at once. He did not seem to like the subject.

"I suppose I may as well come right out with it, Miss Ohlstrom," he answered, looking round the room to be sure that no one had come in. "The fact is"—looking out of the window and tugging at the blind—"the fact is—your friend—I mean the gentleman you knew as Mr. Maxwell—is a rascal." Without looking at her, he could feel her tremble as she sank into the window cushions. He did not like to look at her. He went on. "I persuaded Mr. Hartley that as I was his confidential man, he might as well tell me the whole truth as have me find it out elsewhere, and perhaps get a false im-

pression. He says your friend's name is not Maxwell at all. That is why you could not get any information about him at the club. They knew him there as Milton Fletcher. At the last hotel he stopped at his name was James Walton, and at the one he went to before he was Milton Fletcher his name was Stewart, and goodness knows how many other names he had."

He stopped and looked at her for a moment. She was very pale. She did not look up when he ceased speaking. Her lips gradually compressed until they were nothing but a thin straight line, as she said decisively:

"I don't believe a word of it. Mr. Hartley is deceiving you."

"No, I assure you. I went to the club this afternoon myself, and I found he was known there as Milton Fletcher. I went to the hotels, and I found that his name was Fletcher at one and Walton at the other. I promised to help you, you know," he added, stooping over her, "and I have done the best I could to find any mistake on Mr. Hartley's part; but I am convinced that he is perfectly frank in the matter."

She put up her hand, as if to keep him off, and looked straight ahead out of the window. Her eyes were full of tears now. "You must

be mistaken," she said very quietly. "Mr. Maxwell brought letters to us, you know, from an uncle; papa's brother."

"Mr. Hartley told me that I would find out he had made your acquaintance through letters."

"How on earth could he know that, when he did not know who Mr. Maxwell was, even?" she said quickly, as if she had found a flaw in the story.

"He knows the man, and he knows the letters were forgeries." She looked at him beseechingly, but he went straight on. "I may as well tell you the whole truth, and have done with it, Miss Ohlstrom, although I hate to hurt your feelings in undeceiving you. Mr. Maxwell, as you call him, was one of the Ardmore gang. The police found in his room at the hotel some of the baggage that they knew belonged to the gang, and they were just going to arrest him when he ran away. Their business was passing bad bank notes, and it seems that the gang used innocent women as tools to pass the notes. They would pick out some stylish-looking girl, and one of the best-looking of the gang, who made a specialty of that sort of thing, would present forged letters to her family. Then he would make love to her, and usually persuaded her to run off with him to

some other country——" She started violently, and drew in her underlip with a little shudder. "Once there, they would force her to pass off their counterfeits, and sometimes——"

He did not go on. The girl before him was not listening. With her face buried in the cushions beside her she was sobbing like a child. He tiptoed over to the library door and closed it. Then he went back to her. She heard the door close, and stood up to meet him. Her face was very stern. The mouth was a thin red line once more.

"Please send me home at once," she said. "I don't want to hear anything more. I don't want ever to see you again. No!" She put out her hand protestingly as he started toward her. "You must forgive me, but I cannot bear the sight of you. As for Mr. Hartley," she added, her voice rising as if in anger, "I don't believe him. I *won't* believe him. It's all a lie," she almost shouted, stamping her foot. "It's a lie and a shame, and I *won't* believe it! If I believed that I would kill myself. It's a *lie*, I say. A LIE!"

"But, my dear Miss Ohlstrom," he gasped, quite carried off his feet by this sudden outburst of passion.

"I don't care what you say. I don't believe

it. I'll wait until I see him, if it's fifty years. Oh, why doesn't he come back and deny these dreadful stories!" She fell back into the window cushions again, and burst into hysterical tears.

McBride was completely dumbfounded. He could not imagine what to do. If any one should come into the library and find him standing over a pretty girl in hysterics, he would never hear the end of it. The only thing he could think of was to call one of the women servants and tell her that a lady had been taken ill, and to put her in a cab and send her home. But how to get her through the crowd downstairs with those streaming eyes and wet cheeks he could not imagine. What would the old gentleman say that had introduced them only a few minutes before?

He stepped out into the hall. No one was in that part of the building then. They were all downstairs at the exhibition, probably. He went as fast as he could to the servants' quarters and called one of the maids. He explained matters as they went back to the library together, slipping a bill into her hand, and asking her to manage it quietly.

When they reached the library, it was empty.

CHAPTER XXVI

WHEN Helen Ohlstrom reached her home again, and threw herself upon the bed, there was only one thought that stood out clearly and forcibly from all the dreadful things she had listened to that afternoon: "The best-looking of the gang makes love to the girl, and persuades her to run off with him to some foreign country." In the hundreds of times that she had allowed her memory to run over the details of that last evening with Hardy Maxwell, there had never failed to be a little pang when she recalled his peculiar insistence on the possibility that she would have to go to him.

Somehow or other, she attached little importance to the change of names; it was so overshadowed by the other. Besides, McBride had been guilty of that himself. It might be quite common in business, although she was not aware of it. She did not think anything about the baggage in the room. The two dreadful facts that stared her in the face were, that he had run away, and that just before he went, evi-

dently knowing he was going, he had asked her if she would follow him.

She could not imagine what to do. She longed for the sympathy and advice of some trusted friend; but she could not think of any one that she would dare to trust with such a dreadful secret. McBride was the only one to whom she had been weak enough to hint at her engagement without being really sure of it herself. He was the only person she could think of in this emergency; but she shrank from the thought of even seeing him again. She divined his feelings toward her, and that fact made her doubt his motives. He seemed to be her evil genius. But for him she would never have heard all these things about Hardy.

As she thought over the details of what McBride had told her, she recalled as peculiar the fact that Mr. Hartley should know that the letters Hardy had brought to her parents were forged. It suddenly flashed upon her that the simplest thing to do would be to ask her father to write to his brother in England and find out if that letter was genuine. It struck her as peculiar that Hardy Maxwell had brought no other letters and seemed to have no other friends.

On second thoughts, it would be awkward to

ask her father to write such a letter. Why not write it herself? She need not ask any direct questions. Why could she not write a few lines to her aunt, saying something nice about Mr. Hardy Maxwell and what a pleasant acquaintance they had found him? If her aunt had never heard of such a person, she would not be long in saying so. The idea seemed so practical that she jumped up, almost resolved to send a cable message. It was only the fear that it would look too important that deterred her from telegraphing.

She went downstairs and got the morning paper. There was a mail vessel sailing on Wednesday at 11. The mails closed at 7:30. If she wrote a letter at once and posted it that evening, it would catch the morning mail at 7:30. To make quite sure, she took it to the branch postoffice herself, and put a special delivery stamp on it; not knowing that such extra postage was wasted on foreign letters.

Next morning at breakfast, she succeeded in extracting from her father the opinion that a letter sent to Europe that day would probably be delivered on the following Thursday or Friday week, and that the very earliest possible answer would reach New York two weeks from

Saturday. In the winter it might not be delivered until Monday, if the boat was delayed.

That seemed a long, long way off to her; but there was nothing to do but to wait. She hoped that something might happen in the meantime. Perhaps *he* would write!

McBride called that afternoon about five o'clock and sent up his card; but Helen told the maid to say she was not at home. She did not want to see him. She wanted to be alone. She simply dreaded the idea of having him repeat or add to any of the terrible things he had told her the day before.

The next morning she received a very courteous letter from him. It was full of regrets for the pain he had caused her, and said he was sorry that he had not found her at home when he called on her. He regretted to say that Mr. Hartley had left the city, and he had had no opportunity to verify or disprove anything; but he was quite sure he was right about Mr. Maxwell. He ended by saying that if there was anything he could do to get at the bottom of the matter, he was at her service, absolutely and without reserve. He had promised to help her to find Mr. Maxwell, and he meant every word of it.

Her first impulse was to make no answer;

but after thinking over the matter all day she realized more and more that after all he was the only person who knew her trouble. He was the only connecting link between herself and her truant lover. Perhaps he could do something after all. While her instinct told her that he might not be particularly anxious to clear up every sinister rumor reflecting on Hardy Maxwell's reputation, but that he might be, if anything, secretly pleased at the idea of getting rid of a rival, he might be able to determine the doubts in her mind, one way or the other.

So she sat down and wrote him a very friendly note, in which she made this proposition. He had made dreadful accusations against her friend and the friend of her family. She did not believe a word of it. The very least he could do, she thought, would be to make some effort to prove the justice of his accusations. He was a man. Why could he not find out the truth beyond all question? All he had said rested on the word of a third person, Mr. Hartley. If Mr. Maxwell was such a dangerous character, other people must know it.

She kept a copy of that letter, which she could

not help thinking was rather clever. She was very curious to know what answer Mr. McBride would make, or what he would do. She had not long to wait.

CHAPTER XXVII

MR. GROSCUP called at Hartley's office on Thursday morning, only to discover that Hartley had fled to Florida, and that McBride was in full charge of his affairs.

The lawyer was rather favorably impressed with the appearance and manner of the young man, and was in no hurry to bring his call to an end. The opportunity to have a quiet talk with Hartley's confidential clerk was rather too good to be lost, the lawyer thought. He had gathered from the interview with Hartley at Green's that McBride was familiar with some of the circumstances of the case in which Groscup himself was engaged as counsel. The extent of the clerk's knowledge was problematical. Perhaps McBride could throw some light on certain parts which were not at all clear to the lawyer so far.

The most natural introduction to the subject was, of course, the girl in the case. Groscup was very much astonished to learn that McBride knew her personally and had called at her house. In fact he could hardly believe it.

"Well, Mr. McBride," he said, "I am Mr. Hartley's counsel; retained in case there should be any trouble in this matter. You are his confidential secretary. Would it not be well for us to be perfectly frank with each other?"

"Certainly, my dear sir. That is just what I wish. I have nothing to conceal in the matter, I assure you."

"Then you will not take offense at anything I may say; however it may upset your preconceived opinions of certain—people?" He was going to say "young ladies," but he thought better of it.

"Of course not. I shall be glad to have a few facts in place of all this talk."

"Well, the night before last, I dined with the young lady you refer to."

"Indeed!" McBride was clearly astounded. "At her house?"

"No. She never dines at home. In a café, on Second Avenue."

McBride sat there with his mouth wide open, as if he had seen a ghost.

"Why," he stammered, "I left her at the Athletic Club in the afternoon; feeling very ill. In fact she was completely prostrated." He ran his hand through his curly hair for a moment and then added: "I don't understand this

business at all. I wish I had never heard of it. There seems to be some trick or double-dealing on the part of every one. That forger, Maxwell, started it all, it seems."

"That forger, Maxwell!" exclaimed the lawyer, suddenly recalling a slip of Hartley's that evening at Green's. "What do you mean by referring to him as a forger, may I ask?"

"Didn't you know he was one of the Ardmore gang?"

"What! The Bank of England forgers?"

"Certainly. The police found the gang's effects in his room at the hotel, I understand. They were about to arrest him when he skipped out."

"You and I are evidently talking about different persons, Mr. McBride."

"That may be. I have never seen Maxwell myself. All I know about him is hearsay. He seems to have had more names than a cat has lives. I don't think Hartley can be mistaken. He made a clean breast of the whole affair to me before he went away. He said he had met this man under the name of Fletcher, quite casually, at a dinner, I believe, and did not know any more about him than his name. Had no further interest in him. Did not even know where he lived. About a week after Fletcher

disappeared, a detective called on Hartley, and stated that he had traced him up as one of Fletcher's acquaintances. Wanted to take him up to headquarters and put him through the third degree, or something like that. Of course Hartley was badly scared, and wanted to know what Fletcher had been up to."

The lawyer was evidently very deeply interested.

"Then the detective told Hartley what they had found out about Fletcher, or Maxwell. How they had traced him to the hotel, and found some of the Ardmore gang's baggage in his room, and all that. The only persons they could think of, Hartley says, that Maxwell would be likely to connect with, was this young lady, Miss Ohlstrom——"

"You mean Miss Stewart?"

"No, I mean Miss Ohlstrom."

"Well, go on. Hartley said the name was assumed."

"Hartley says the detectives had shadowed Maxwell, and had seen him with her on several occasions, and that they were watching her now, thinking he might write to her."

"They will catch a weasel asleep if they get anything out of her; that's all I have to say. She's nobody's fool."

McBride went on without noticing the interruption:

"Of course I felt it my duty to state the facts to Miss Ohlstrom, who is a friend of mine, and to inform her that she had been grossly deceived by the forged letters of introduction, and so forth."

"Under what name did she know him?"

"Maxwell. Hardy Maxwell."

"And had she no knowledge of his knowing Hartley, Maynard, Dr. Ramie, Douglas, and the rest?"

"Of course she had. It was because she identified those gentlemen as friends of Maxwell's that I demanded an explanation from Hartley. She knew the whole story about the dinner, and the bet they were going to make, and all that nonsense."

"What a smart liar she must be!" exclaimed the lawyer, half to himself.

"What do you mean, sir?" snapped the younger man, his eyes flashing with anger. "I trust you do not refer to Miss Ohlstrom?"

"Call her Miss Ohlstrom or Miss Stewart, which you please. That is the one I was thinking of. She's the finest actress that ever lived, and if Maxwell fooled her with forged letters —well, they were quite unnecessary, that's all.

You don't need letters to a woman of that kind."

The young man rose from his chair suddenly. "Really, Mr. Groscup, I cannot permit such language about a young lady that I consider a personal friend."

"If you will sit down, and have a little patience, Mr. McBride, I think I can convince you that your enthusiasm is due to your youth and want of experience of the world. A woman that carries a loaded revolver, and picks up acquaintances in a public café——"

"What's that? What the devil do you mean, sir? How dare you insinuate such things?"

"Sit down, my dear sir, and be calm," rejoined the lawyer, quite unmoved. "Let me ask you a question or two. Have you ever dined at her house?"

"No," he snapped.

"Ever seen her parents?"

"No; but an old friend of mine knows them."

"Indeed! I shall have to trouble you for his name and address presently. Who introduced you to her, as you have never seen these alleged parents of hers?"

"He did. At the Athletic Club; on Tuesday afternoon."

"Tuesday afternoon, eh? Rather a short ac-

quaintance. Have you called upon her since then?"

"Yes. That is to say," he stammered, "the fact is, she was not in."

"You thought she was not in, perhaps." McBride winced and began to feel rather queer. The lawyer went on. "I judge from what you say that she did not ask you to call at her house the first time you went there. You say you have not been there since you were introduced. Were you welcome on the occasion of your first call?" The lawyer smiled as he saw the color come and go on the young man's face. "Was not the first time you saw her here in the office?"

"Yes. She came in here to ask about Maxwell."

"The next time was when she waylaid you in the corridor, downstairs?"

"That was a lie. I told Hartley that story. The fact is, I called on her at her house."

"So the history of your acquaintance amounts to this: A fine-looking girl strolled into this office, and you got stuck on her, and practically picked her up without knowing anything about her. She allowed you to call on her, and——"

"Why, dash it all! Wasn't I introduced to her on Tuesday?"

"That is the day you told her Maxwell was a fraud, I believe?"

"Yes, and she went on terribly about it, and declared she didn't believe a word of it. Said she didn't care what we thought; it was all a lie. The fact is, I think she is engaged to Maxwell."

Groscup whistled. He was thinking of the head-waiter's diagnosis of the case. "Married, you mean," he suggested, with a smile. Noticing how pale McBride turned at the words, he went on: "She and Maxwell used to dine every night at the same café that I dined in with her on Tuesday night. The head-waiter told me he thought they were married. He described Maxwell exactly."

The lawyer paused. McBride was becoming paler every moment. Finally the young man managed to ask:

"Did none of the party you were with know that she was married?"

"There was no party. I never saw her before. The head-waiter put me at the same table with her, and we got into conversation and had a bottle of wine together. Fine-looking girl! I understand that she has quite a few—what shall I say—admirers?"

McBride was holding on to the arms of his

chair and staring at the lawyer as if he were fascinated by a snake. He noted the cynical smile that accompanied the last words.

"It's a lie," he hissed.

Groscup rose from his chair with great dignity, and buttoned up his coat. "Really, Mr. McBride, this has gone far enough. I shall leave you to recover your senses and your good manners together."

McBride was upon his feet in an instant, and came so close that the lawyer thought he was about to lay violent hands on him. "Liar! Scoundrel!" he snarled. "You shall repeat those words to Miss Ohlstrom's face, or I'll break every bone in your body."

The lawyer was now really alarmed, and began to fear that he had a dangerous man to deal with. "I am perfectly willing to meet her in your presence, but I believe she is not at home to you," retorted the lawyer, getting warm himself. "As I am confident that she will not refuse herself to *me*," with a bow, pointing his hand to his breast, "suppose you allow me to take you up to her?"

Groscup's manner was maddening.

"Yes. This minute. I'll go with you right now."

"Such haste is entirely unnecessary," re-

marked the lawyer, cooling off a little. She does not wish people to whom she has not been introduced to call at her house. She will dine at the same café this evening, probably. Meet me at my club at six o'clock and I will take you there." Then seeing the young man was becoming calmer, he added: "I don't blame you for being fascinated by such a woman; but I fear you are not the first victim by any means. Perhaps if I succeed in disillusionizing you, I shall be doing you a service. To-night at six, then."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE head-waiter was delighted to see his patron again. Would he sit at the same table with the lady? She was not yet in the room. Groscup took the man aside, and told him in a whisper that he would prefer to sit near enough for his companion to sit facing her, but not near enough for their conversation to be overheard. He himself preferred to sit with his back to her, so that he need not bow when she came in; but he would like to be told when she arrived. That could be easily arranged.

McBride seemed to enjoy his surroundings. He liked the pretty women and the dresses and the music, and the general air of life about the place, all of which was quite new to him, as he knew little or nothing of the restaurant side of New York life. The two men had not been seated long before a nudge from the head waiter's elbow warned the lawyer that she had arrived. McBride caught sight of her as she came in, and he watched her all the way from the door to her seat. He had a quick eye for a pretty woman with a good figure.

"Fine-looking girl about two tables behind you," he whispered, as he carelessly broke a piece of bread.

"Do you know her?" the lawyer asked carelessly, turning his head just enough to be sure that it was she.

"Never saw her before."

"Doesn't she look like any one you know?" The lawyer's tone betrayed his astonishment.

"Not particularly. Looks about the same height and figure as Miss Ohlstrom; but older, and nothing like as good looking."

"Indeed! You are looking at the woman that is supposed to be Miss Ohlstrom. She calls herself Miss Stewart."

McBride laughed aloud.

"That Miss Ohlstrom! My dear fellow, that's nothing but an ordinary pretty woman. Miss Ohlstrom is an angel."

The lawyer admonished him to speak a little lower; but he went on, almost boisterously, extending his hand: "I beg your pardon, old man, for everything that happened this morning. I have only one explanation to offer, dash it all. Hartley is a liar."

"But the woman you are looking at is undoubtedly Maxwell's wife," Groscup whispered.

"Hartley's end of it may not be straight; but mine is."

"I don't care who she is," retorted McBride. "A fine-looking woman; but not my style. She's not in it with Miss Ohlstrom for a minute. But say!" with a sudden inspiration, "if you can prove that Maxwell is already married, or if this woman is engaged to him, you can do me a great favor."

"We will come to that later," remarked the lawyer, with a smile that showed he understood perfectly what was in the younger man's mind.

"What I am curious to know is, how you came to take this woman for Miss Ohlstrom."

The lawyer took out his card-case and produced a slip of paper, which he passed over the table. "There is the address that Mr. Hartley sent over to me." McBride glanced at it, and laid it down with a laugh.

"That is not Miss Ohlstrom's address, any more than it is her name. Her name is not Stewart."

"She was followed from Mr. Hartley's office to that address on the morning you first saw her."

"Indeed!" with another laugh. "By whom, pray?"

"By one of the men in your office; Johnson."

"Johnson! We have no one by that name in the office. The only Johnson I know comes from a private detective agency. He has some important business with Mr. Hartley, apparently. He is going to call to-morrow morning for some letter, and I am to make some excuse to put him off. I don't know anything about his business with Mr. Hartley; but I certainly do know that he never followed Miss Ohlstrom that morning; because I went down to the street with her myself."

"Oh!" was all the lawyer had to say. Then the two men looked at each other for a space. Each seemed to know the other was thinking about something else.

"I should like to meet Mr. Johnson when he calls for that letter. Could you detain him until you telephone for me, do you think?"

"Certainly. If you will stay in, as I do not know when he will come."

When the coffee was brought on, Groscup turned round in his chair to look leisurely about him, and then, as if quite unexpectedly, recognized the lady at the table near by, and bowed. She made a sign for them to join her, and McBride was presented. The young man was in high spirits at the termination of his day's troubles, and made himself very agreeable. He

also had to confess that Miss Stewart was a charming woman. He observed that the lawyer several times touched his foot lightly under the table, at the same moment that he mentioned some name, such as Maxwell, or Maynard, or Hartley; but the woman showed no sign. He might as well have dragged the name of his office-boy into the conversation.

When it was about time to go, Groscup seemed to think of something. "By the way," he said, "I have taken the liberty of presenting my friend by name. My own name is Groscup," bowing. "Was I correct in addressing you as Miss Stewart?"

"I wondered how you knew my name," she said lightly; "but it is Mrs. Stewart. I am sorry we did not see each other sooner. We might have dined together. Good-night."

"Well," remarked the lawyer, as they stepped out into the night air: "We have straightened out two riddles to-day. You have helped me considerably by identifying Mr. Maxwell as one of the Ardmore gang; which is something I am sure no one ever suspected before; and which accounts for many things. I cannot imagine why Mr. Hartley did not mention it. I, on the other hand, have cleared up for you the r[illegible] surrounding Miss Ohlstrom. The nex[illegible]

to find Mr. Maxwell and land him in jail, I suppose, although I am inclined to bet against that being possible for some time to come. I should also be very sorry to see such a charming woman as Mrs. Stewart in such deep trouble."

"And I should be very glad to see Miss Ohlstrom safely out of a nasty mess. Falling in love with a married man is bad enough; but with a thief and a forger, whose wife carries a loaded revolver!"

CHAPTER XXIX

THE next morning McBride received Miss Ohlstrom's letter, and he lost no time in answering it. He began by expressing his entire willingness to assist in running down Mr. Maxwell, as he had promised; adding, with great care to make it seem like a most commonplace announcement, that he had had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Maxwell's wife at dinner the night before, and that the task of finding Mr. Maxwell himself would probably be much simpler now.

He sent the letter out to the post at once; so that it should reach her that afternoon. He spent most of his leisure that day in wondering what effect the latest piece of information would have.

The effect was a telephone message, asking him to call that evening. She did not ask for him; but gave the message to the office-boy, so that he had no chance to speak to her himself.

Miss Ohlstrom received him in the parlor. She looked very pale, and her eyes betrayed that she had been weeping. "I cannot stand this suspense any longer," she began

"What is the meaning of that dreadful letter you wrote me about meeting a Mrs. Maxwell?"

McBride explained the circumstances without the slightest regard for the anguish he was causing the girl before him. He seemed to glory in his triumph, and in the proof that his estimate of Mr. Maxwell was correct. He presented the connecting links that had led to the discovery, showing how various contradictory stories told by Mr. Hartley had been pieced together; developing the fact that Mr. Maxwell had been shadowed before his escape, and had been frequently seen with this woman, who acknowledged that her name was Mrs. Stewart, and Stewart was the name that Maxwell had given at the first hotel he went to, and was undoubtedly his right name. The head-waiter in the restaurant had told Mr. Groscup that they were a married couple.

Then he went on to tell how Mr. Groscup had sent to the address given to Mr. Hartley by the detective, and had found out about this woman's dining at the café; and how Groscup had gone there himself and got into conversation with her without the formality of an introduction. He made no concealment of the fact that Mr. Hartley had supposed, when Miss Ohlstrom called at the office, that she was the

person whose address the detective had given him, and McBride took great credit to himself for having discovered the mistake. He said nothing about the scene in the office with the lawyer the day before. In fact, he was rather ashamed of it.

"It seems to me that it all comes back to Mr. Hartley again," Helen said sadly. "I could believe the story, perhaps, if he were not mixed up in it; but I have no faith in anything that comes through him. Did you address this woman as Mrs. Maxwell?"

"Of course not. She goes by the name of Stewart."

"Why didn't you say something about him, or about some of his friends, so that you could see if she knew them?"

He had to acknowledge that the lawyer had tried that experiment on two occasions, without success. "You see, Miss Ohlstrom, these criminals are very clever. You can't catch them that way."

"And who introduced you to this woman and told you she was Mrs. Maxwell?"

"No one introduced us. Mr. Groscup got into a conversation with her at the café. The detective had followed Mr. Maxwell and seen him with her several times."

"Then it may be all a mistake. Her name may not be Stewart at all. It may not be Maxwell. I think you said she had never been addressed as Mrs. Maxwell. If this woman will come to me and tell me she is his wife, I might believe her. No; I don't think I should. I never dreamed there were such liars in the world as I have heard of lately. I don't wish to doubt your word, Mr. McBride; but I think you are being humbugged." Then, taking a long breath, and shaking her head with a very positive air, she added, in a much more determined tone: "I don't believe a word of this Mrs. Maxwell story. There is only one person in the world that I would believe, and that is Hardy himself."

"But you must acknowledge that he is a shocking liar. He changed his name three or four times. There is no getting round that."

"I have thought over that too. I am not so sure that it is not a mistake, just like all the other things. I cannot help thinking that the person you call Milton Fletcher and Mr. Maxwell are not the same. No one ever saw the two men that claimed those two names together. Did you ever meet any one that knew him as Mr. Maxwell?"

McBride had to acknowledge that he had

not, but he insisted that he knew of persons who had known him as Fletcher and as Walton.

"Did you know him as such?" she asked quickly.

"No; but Mr. Hartley did."

"There comes Mr. Hartley again. No, Mr. McBride, I may as well tell you the truth. I don't doubt your good faith in the matter; but I don't believe that Hardy is a liar. I don't believe he is a forger. I don't believe he is married. I don't believe that this woman you have picked up in a café is his wife. I should not be surprised to learn that he never met her in his life. I will put my faith in what I myself know of Hardy Maxwell against all the detectives and lawyers and Hartleys in the world."

McBride shrugged his shoulders, as if he had nothing to say in the face of such obstinacy as that. She went on:

"But enough of this. Can't we *do* something? Can't we settle this uncertainty somehow, and get to the bottom of it all?"

"I am ready to do anything you suggest," he said quietly.

"Why not ask the police to find him?"

"I suppose they are doing their best in that direction now, if they know who he is. I judge

from the papers that the whole police force of New York has been after that gang for weeks."

"Why, he was in the city every day. He went walking with me on the avenue. He belonged to a well known club. Why didn't they arrest him then?"

"Give it up," was all McBride could say, for he was struck by the force of her arguments. "Shall I go to the police and tell them he was a friend of yours, and went walking with you?" He smiled ironically.

"Yes! Certainly!" she answered instantly. "You can tell them that. I am not ashamed of Hardy Maxwell. You can tell them that I went walking with him; that he visited me at my own home, and that I am engaged to him. And you can add that I am not ashamed of it either, and that I hope they will send for me the moment they find him. I want to be the first to tell him that no matter what he has been to me, I was true to him. Two wrongs do not make a right, Mr. McBride, and his falseness, if such it be, is no excuse for my being false to him."

Mr. McBride stood there stupefied. He could not understand such philosophy. "Why," he said, "if any one were to come and tell me facts as straightforward as those I have told you, I would certainly attach some weight to

them, and take it for granted that my informant was telling the truth until I found out the contrary."

"If you were in love with a girl and some one came and told you stories about her, you would take it quietly, and believe every word of it, would you?"

"Why, of course——" The recollection of the language he had used to Mr. Groscup in the office the day before stopped him, and he turned very red in the face. He was about to stammer something, when she went on:

"Your arguments do not convince me at all. I do not believe any disinterested person would listen to them. Perhaps if you will go and tell the police that the dreadful forger they are looking for is Mr. Maxwell, they might ask you for proofs. Do you think your evidence would convict him? If they asked me, I would swear on a thousand bibles that he was innocent."

When he came to think over it, McBride had to admit that he could not prove very much. In spite of himself, he felt that she was right about one thing; there were too many of Mr. Hartley's falsehoods floating round to make a straight story out of what he had heard. Finally he had an idea.

"You seem to be the only person, Miss

Ohlstrom, who knew him as Maxwell. At the clubs and at the hotel he was known as Milton Fletcher. There is no doubt about his being the same man, as your own identification of him is complete. Now, why not ask the police to find Milton Fletcher? Have you a picture of him?"

"No," she said, half regretfully, "and what is very curious, I have not a line from him. He never wrote me a note, and I never saw his handwriting."

"But you can describe him. Suppose we write it down."

Yes, she could do that, and while the description may have been a trifle flattering, it was fairly accurate; quite good enough for any detective. The mustache and the Vandyke, Mr. McBride did not think much of. He suggested that Mr. Fletcher had probably cut all that off when he ran away, if it was not false in the first place.

"Oh, not that!" she said, looking up quickly. "I cannot imagine him with a shaven face. Please don't describe him without a mustache." McBride was quite sure the mustache was misleading; but it might stand in the description of what Maxwell was.

An hour later, one of the men at 300 Mul-

berry Street was reading over that description carefully. He did not think much of it. He wanted to know something about the clothes Fletcher had on when last seen, and was specially inquisitive as to the probable motive for his disappearance. Was he in trouble, or in love? Did he drink, or use drugs? Had he done anything that was worrying him? Or had he just dropped out of sight? Had he any money about him at the time, that he might have been robbed of?

McBride had no idea that he would be asked so many questions. He thought the description of the man's appearance was quite enough; which made the officer smile. The most important thing of all, the officer told him, was where he was last seen alive, and by whom. McBride promised to find that out, and bring the information next day. Somehow or other, he was glad to get out of that office. He felt that he might make a slip any moment, and that the officer would see through the whole thing, and lock him up as a witness. He would then have to account for his knowledge of the Ardmore gang's affairs.

That night every police platoon that went on duty in New York City heard a description of Mr. Milton Fletcher read out at the station-

house. From that day on, every policeman in New York was supposed to have a special eye out for a handsome young man about six feet tall, with black hair; very quick and active in his movements, and with an English accent. As there are two or three such descriptions read out every night, it is more than probable that this one did not make any particular impression. Fletcher's own observation would probably apply, that as there was no financial inducement for any officer to devote his time and attention to that particular case, it would have to take its chance with the rest. But Helen Ohlstrom felt serenely confident that the police would find Hardy Maxwell before morning. Such is the popular belief in the power of forces with which we are not acquainted.

CHAPTER XXX

ON Friday morning Johnson was pacing up and down the hall when McBride arrived at the office. The confidential clerk did not expect him so early, but he had arranged a little signal with the office boy that would call up Mr. Groscup at once. McBride knew the detective by sight, having seen him enter the private office with Hartley, so he addressed him by name and asked him to come inside.

Mr. Hartley's absence from the city was briefly explained as unexpected and unavoidable. Mr. McBride's position as his confidential secretary was also explained, dilated on, in fact; but Johnson was wary. The first thing he asked for was the letter. Had Mr. Hartley left one for him?

"Why really, I don't remember it, you know. He may have left it among some papers that he told me would explain themselves. What was it about?"

Johnson did not seem very willing to enter into explanations; but seemed to be put out that the letter was not ready for him. He was

wondering just how much this confidential clerk knew, and just how much he could be trusted. It was a difficult situation to handle, but with the instinct of a true diplomat, Johnson decided to let the other man do the talking.

Just then the boy tapped on the door; put his head in and said: "Not downtown yet, sir." McBride nodded that he understood.

The idea that was uppermost in McBride's mind was to discover, if possible, how Miss Stewart had been mistaken for Miss Ohlstrom; but at the same time he realized the importance of avoiding any mention of Miss Ohlstrom. That would immediately put the detective on her track; perhaps with unpleasant consequences. He had not the slightest idea what the letter promised by Mr. Hartley should have referred to, so he could not begin on that clue. The only thing upon which he was at all sure of his ground, was the slip of paper that Hartley had sent over to Groscup, bearing Miss Stewart's name and address. Why not begin on that?

"Mr. Hartley told me that you had followed a young lady from this office one morning last week," he began, "and had traced her to a certain address, which you gave him. I suppose you have established the fact that she is a Mrs. Maxwell?"

The detective was evidently taken aback. He did not know exactly what to say, and not being as ready with subterfuges as Mr. Hartley, he could not find words to conceal his thoughts, so he kept silent. He could not imagine how to account for Mr. Hartley's extraordinary statement that he had followed Miss Stewart from that office. Seeing that he was expected to say something, he twisted his slouch hat a little and looked at the floor for fully a minute before he spoke.

"Well, it's not quite clear to me yet, sir," and then he stopped, not knowing what more to say, and not being very clear in his own mind as to what he was talking about. He still wanted to gain time.

"I suppose you have no idea where *Mr.* Maxwell is now," the young man went on, sparring for an opening.

"Well, I know where part of him is, sir. But I don't know where his head is, sir. I wish I did."

"What do you mean?" inquired McBride, in evident astonishment.

"Excuse me, sir," the detective said hurriedly, "but I supposed that Mr. Hartley had told you *my* theory of it."

"He did. But you see he didn't agree with

it." This was a shot at a venture. McBride had not the slightest idea to what theory the detective was referring.

"I thought he didn't, sir. But it's pretty clear to me, sir. Part of Mr. Maxwell is in chemicals at the morgue, and the rest of him is still in the river somewhere."

"But you don't mean to say——" gasped the young man.

"Sure I do, sir. I'm as certain of it as I'm sitting here. It was Maynard murdered him, in that cab. Both of 'em disappeared the same night. I traced the cab to Maynard."

"What! You mean that cab they found by the river two or three weeks ago?"

"That's the one, sir. Maynard hired that cab, or stole it, and had his pal on the box. He called for Stewart, or Walton, or Fletcher, or whatever you call him, at his hotel and took him away in that cab. Cut him up. Threw him in the river." Johnson made appropriate motions with his hands to illustrate the tragedy.

"You must be crazy. Why haven't the police arrested Maynard long ago? I thought there was no clue whatever to the victim; much less to the murderer."

"Well, sir, it's hard to prove it, you know; but that's my theory. Mr. Hartley, he engaged

me on this job to follow Mr. Fletcher two weeks ago Monday, as you know, sir. We shadowed him for three days; but the only person we could find him connecting with was this Miss Stewart. It's her address I gave Mr. Hartley, sir. I got it following Fletcher. I never knew she was at this office till Mr. Hartley told me, sir."

It was on the tip of McBride's tongue to tell Johnson that Miss Stewart was never in that office; but he caught himself just in time.

"Mr. Hartley probably told you, sir," looking at him inquiringly, "that we was to watch for Mr. Fletcher at the Earlswood Hotel that Thursday night."

"Yes, I know all about that," said McBride quickly, seeing that the detective was evidently feeling his way.

"But he never showed up. No one hasn't seen him since. Nor Maynard neither." These statements were each accompanied by emphatic nods. "I followed up a clue I had at the Realton, where Fletcher was stopping, and I made up my mind by putting this and that together that this here Cab No. 44, which was at the hotel that night pretty late, was brought there by Maynard. And he went away in it," with another nod. "And no one ain't seen *him* since," with a still more emphatic nod.

"But what has that got to do with Maxwell, or Fletcher? Where does he come in?"

"Maynard sent up his card to him at the hotel, and waited around for him half an hour."

"Did they drive off together?"

"Now you've got me, sir. That's the place where my trail is lost. I'm only surmising the rest of it; but it's a good working theory. Don't you think so, sir?"

"Then you think that Maxwell is murdered? Why don't you explain your theory to the police and let them help you?"

"Yes, sir. I think he's the fellow that's in the river. But I'm not giving my theory away to the police. They would claim all the credit for it themselves, sir, and throw me out. They're kind of down on private detectives, you know, sir. They hate to have any one smarter than they is, sir, the police do. There's more money in giving the steer to the papers, sir, than to the police. That's my game when I'm through with Mr. Hartley."

"What was the motive for murdering him?" McBride asked, not noticing the last part of the detective's remarks.

"Now you've got me again, sir. I can't find out much about this Maynard, except that he shot and killed a man once before. Wasn't

never tried for it, seemingly. These fellows that are in society are pretty hard to trace when it comes to their private lives, sir. What the papers print about them is mostly guess work. The motive, as you say, sir; that's what stumps me."

"Then the whole police force of New York are looking for a dead man," Mr. McBride remarked, musingly, as if talking to himself.

"There's no one looking for him, sir. The police don't know nothing about it. Mr. Hartley's paying me to keep quiet about my views, sir. But it's hard, sir. It's very hard, with the papers ready to pay big money for tips like what I could give 'em."

"But I sent out a general alarm for Milton Fletcher last night. I gave the police a complete description of him."

Mr. Johnson gave a violent start. "For mercy's sake, sir! And what did you say he was wanted for? Did you tell them he was one of the Ardmore gang?"

"Not at all. I just described the man, and asked them to find him. What proof have you that he was one of that gang?"

"Well, sir," said the detective, shaking his head, "that's too long a story to go over again now. But if you'd have told the police to find

Maynard, sir, you'd have some fun. To have the whole force looking for a dead man, and they having parts of him in chemicals at the morgue. Why, that's positively funny, sir; that is."

McBride turned over several things in his mind and started on a new tack. "You will excuse me, Mr. Johnson; but I cannot quite reconcile your statement that it was in following Mr. Fletcher, or Maxwell, nearly three weeks ago, that you came across Miss Stewart; and Mr. Hartley's statement that the first time you ever saw Miss Stewart was when you followed her from this office, only last week."

Mr. Johnson shrugged his shoulders. "That's his business, sir. It's my private opinion, sir, that Mr. Hartley knows a good deal more about Mr. Fletcher than he cares to tell. I'm thinking he knows considerable about Miss Stewart, too, sir. It was a letter of introduction to her I was to get here this morning, sir. She's the only chance we have to find out anything more about Fletcher, who he was and where he come from. In the meantime, I'm doing all I can on my own account to locate Mr. Paul Maynard."

"I can introduce you to Miss Stewart any time."

"The deuce you can, sir!"

"Yes. What Mr. Hartley wants more than anything else at present, he tells me, is to establish beyond question that fact that this Mrs. Stewart, as she calls herself is really Mrs. Maxwell, or Mrs. Fletcher, whichever you please." Mr. McBride gasped at his own temerity in making this statement. But why should he not seize this opportunity to obtain the proofs which would set all doubts on Miss Ohlstrom's part at rest? No matter whether Maxwell were dead or alive; if he were a married man, that would be more than enough.

"Well, it wouldn't do for me to tackle her myself, sir. We have a man that's been trying to get acquainted with her for two weeks. If you would introduce him, it would be what Mr. Hartley's been after for some time, sir."

McBride made some remark about the man's not having been very wide-awake if it took him two weeks to make that acquaintance, when he knew of some one that had done it in a few hours. Had he known that the handsome Mr. Frank Doremus, who was supposed to have that matter in hand, had no existence outside Mr. Johnson's imagination, and that Mr. Johnson himself was not wasting any time on Miss Stewart, he might have spared Johnson the

necessity of blushing slightly, and laughing in his sleeve at the same time.

McBride wrote the name of the Second Avenue café on a slip of paper, and handed it to the detective. "Bring your man there tomorrow night at six, and I will introduce him."

"All right, sir. In the meantime, sir, I hope you won't say anything about my theory of the cab business to any one, sir; specially to the police. They wouldn't give me no credit for nothing, sir. If there is anything in that job when Mr. Hartley's through with me, sir; I'd like to make a bit out of it for myself through the papers."

"You can trust me. In fact, Mr. Hartley told me that anything you might tell me was to go no further. And," he added slowly, glancing at his desk; "if you want any money, you are to have whatever you call for for yourself and Doremus. It might be worth a little extra if you could get the proofs of that marriage in my hands quickly."

"Thank you, sir. Of course, sir, a little cash always comes in handy. Expenses has to be met in this line, you know, sir."

"How about a couple of hundred?"

"Thank you very much, sir."

McBride excused himself for a minute and

then returned with the bills. Johnson stuffed them into his pocket, and promised there should be no mistake about the meeting next night at the café. He would soon get the proofs of that marriage for him.

Johnson himself appeared at the appointed time. Mr. Doremus was sick, he said, but Johnson would pass the introduction along. He was dressed for the occasion, and McBride could not help smiling at the change in his appearance, although he was evidently very ill at ease in a dinner coat, and looked for all the world like a waiter.

The head-waiter approached them and bowed very low to McBride, who whispered a question to him. The waiter was very sorry; but madam would not be there again. She had dined there last night, and had said good-by to him. She was sailing for Europe to-day, and was already on the high seas.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE next morning, McBride lay back in his easy chair and thought things over, Helen Ohlstrom being the central figure round which his reflections revolved. The departure of Mrs. Stewart had been quite a blow. She had undoubtedly gone to join Mr. Maxwell. The hoped for proofs of that marriage seemed a long way off now.

He had been particularly annoyed by observing that in all his meetings with Miss Ohlstrom, she had regarded him chiefly as some one who could talk about Hardy Maxwell; or who would bring her news of Maxwell; or who would help her to find Maxwell. He was especially hurt when he thought of the eagerness with which she had described Mr. Maxwell for the benefit of the police, and how she had enlarged upon his being so tall and handsome.

He had found the task of cutting out his rival much more difficult than he had expected. If any one had asked his opinion a week before, he would unhesitatingly have said that any girl would throw a man over if she found he had run away from her without a word of fare-

well or explanation. If that was not enough, the knowledge that he was a well-known criminal would have decided her. If there were any doubt about that, she certainly could not withstand the blow of finding that he had been paying attention to another woman—was probably married even—all the time he had been making love to her.

These little things did not seem to affect Helen Ohlstrom. The man on whom she had wasted her affections was clearly a liar, traveling under a number of false names. He was undoubtedly a forger. He had unquestionably been seen with another woman; he had dined with her often in a public café. There seemed little doubt that he was a married man. McBride could not see why Miss Ohlstrom should not cease to speak of him even. She should hate the very memory of him, and do her best to forget that such a creature had ever crossed her path. But Helen Ohlstrom was obstinate to exasperation. Now he could go to her and tell her that Mr. Maxwell was dead. That would be a *non sequitur*, and she would probably come to her senses. That any woman could be proof against such an accumulation of accusations and proofs against her faithless lover seemed incredible; but that she would hold

on to him after he was dead was impossible. Once this rascal Maxwell was out of her mind, McBride felt that he would have a clear field. The sooner that state of affairs could be brought about, the better.

He called on her that evening, and approached the explanation as gently as he could; because he did not want a repetition of the scene at the Athletic Club. He did not tell her that Maxwell was murdered. That could come later. It would be enough to say that he had fallen into the river, and that his body had only just been identified.

She did not cry. She listened as if he were talking about something that had happened to some one else, with which she had nothing to do. She arrived at the source of his information with a very few sharp questions, and then remarked dryly:

"Another story that Mr. Hartley is mixed up in." She shook her head and said she did not believe a word of it.

McBride went over all his arguments again. It was perfectly useless. He hoped she would ask him how Mr. Maxwell came to be in the river, and he tried to lead her to that question by suggesting that his death was the simple and only explanation of her not hearing from him. But

she did not seem to care what explanation might be offered to account for his being drowned. She didn't care if he had run away, she said, and she did not believe he was dead. She didn't care anything about his change of name; and she didn't believe he was a forger. She did not care if he did dine with another woman every night; but she didn't believe he was married to her. Finally she said she didn't care if he was married; she didn't care if he was dead. She said she was going to stick to Hardy Maxwell until he told her those things himself, even if she had to wait until the next world for the explanation.

McBride frankly expressed his amazement at such mad infatuation, especially when wasted on such a worthless object. It seemed to him to be a sin.

"No, it is not a sin," she said slowly, playing with the tassel on the arm of her easy chair, and gazing into the fire. "We cannot all be good, Mr. McBride, any more than we can be great or clever. Our natures do not admit it. But there is one virtue we may all possess if we will only cultivate it. We can at least be loyal to our friends."

"But you surely do not call one a friend who has grossly deceived you; who has given you a

false name; who has flirted with another woman; who has shown himself a coward and a cad by running away without even saying good-by, even if he is not the forger and rascal that he seems to be? Why, I should think you would loathe the very thought that such a person had ever held a place in your affections for a moment."

"I don't care what you say against him, Mr. McBride," she said, quietly but sadly, as the tears rose in her eyes, "some women go through life without ever meeting the man they really love—the one man in the whole world that has that subtle fascination for them that no woman can feel more than once. Those that do meet the right man go one of two ways; to heaven with him; to the other place without him. If the first path is not open to me, I will take the second."

CHAPTER XXXII

THREE weeks had passed since the bloody cab had been discovered on the dock, and the fourth week began. On Saturday the thirty days would expire; but so far from there being any sign of the solution of the mystery, both the public and the police seemed to have forgotten all about it. All Johnson's efforts to locate the fugitive Paul Maynard had failed, and he had to be content to nurse his pet theory of the cab murder in his own bosom. In spite of such additional information as McBride cared to give, the police professed to be unable to find any trace of Milton Fletcher. McBride had not thought it advisable to follow out Johnson's suggestion by asking them to find Mr. Paul Maynard.

Helen Ohlstrom still refused to believe that Hardy Maxwell was either dead or married, or had ever been in love with another woman while she knew him, or had ever committed any forgeries, or belonged to any gangs. He had met with some accident, probably in another town, and when he was able to write to her he would.

No matter how unreasonable that theory might be, it was hopeful, and on that hope she lived.

Madge was no longer so anxious, apparently, to impress upon her friend the desirability of forgetting Hardy Maxwell. Perhaps the reason for this change in her attitude was that she had met McBride.

"These lovers are really very tiresome," she remarked to a girl friend one day. "The last time I was at Helen's, I could hardly keep from yawning. Mr. McBride was there, and the one absorbing topic of conversation seemed to be speculations as to what might have happened to that scamp Maxwell."

"What is Mr. McBride's interest in Mr. Maxwell? I should not think he would care to discuss the Englishman so much if he was as fond of Helen himself as you imagine he is."

"Goodness knows! I used to try to bring Helen to her senses by telling her that it was ridiculous to believe that a man could not find some means of writing a note or sending a message if he was alive. But the only effect was to make Helen go over all the absurd possibilities again. I believe she is going crazy on that subject. When I asked him why he humored Helen so much Mr. McBride told me that the only way he could make himself agreeable to

her was to talk about Hardy Maxwell. As long as he kept to that subject, he said, she would listen forever."

"Very good of him to make a martyr of himself that way, just to please her, don't you think?"

"Well, I told him I did not care to hear anything further about Mr. Maxwell and that he could talk to me about anything he liked. And, would you believe it, all he could talk about was Helen! I really think he is just as much in love with her as she is with Mr. Maxwell."

In reaching this conclusion Madge was perfectly correct. Mr. Hartley's wish had been fulfilled, and the mortgage he hoped for on his confidential clerk's attention was ready for foreclosure. Mr. McBride had met Miss Right.

The hopelessness of his passion was becoming more apparent every day; but he could not tear himself from it. Every time he saw her he became more madly in love with her. Sometimes as he sat looking at her he would long for the good old days of the middle ages, when he could have snatched her from her home and carried her off to some ancient fortress in some lonely forest, bidding defiance to her family and her feelings at the same time.

Mr. Groscup was quite satisfied that the storm

had blown over, and he had cabled to Mr. Frank Douglas to come home. McBride had advised Mr. Hartley that unless he had any further use for Johnson, it would be just as well to stop that drain on his finances; because the said Johnson was not at all bashful about drawing money for the "expenses" of himself and the handsome Mr. Frank Doremus, who seemed to be still engaged on the case, although the person for whose benefit he was employed had disappeared from the scene.

Mr. Frank Douglas arrived at quarantine on Friday night, too late to land; but he found letters for him, telling him that Mr. Groscup and Dr. Ramie would be at the dock to meet him in the morning, and adding that everything was quiet on the Potomac. He knew what that meant, and he was glad to hear it. He had eagerly searched all the newspapers that came on board, to see if there were any item about the mystery of Cab No. 44. Apparently that incident was entirely forgotten, so many and much more interesting events had happened since.

The doctor was very glad to see the returning capitalist, and congratulated him on his fine appearance. Of course Douglas' first question was about the cab, and he could not help ex-

pressing his astonishment that no one had recognized Maynard's ring. The fact that two known men and an unknown cab-driver, could completely disappear at the same time that the tragedy happened, and no one even notice the coincidence, was beyond him. The lawyer told him that it was nothing but his guilty knowledge that supplied the connection which no one else had even dreamed of. Even if they knew that two men and a cab-driver had disappeared, which they didn't, he said, New York was a large place, and many people drop out of sight every day without exciting as much comment as a stickful in the papers.

"And that fellow Fletcher," Douglas went on, as they strolled up and down the dock, waiting for the baggage to come ashore, "pity he turned out to be a wrong-un, you know. I could have used him in my business; and put him in the way of making a great deal more every year than that paltry five thousand he killed Maynard for. No sign of him?"

"No. Not even a suspicion," said the doctor with a laugh. "Eh, Groscup?"

The lawyer did not quite agree. He called the doctor's attention to the fact that Mr. Douglas was not aware of the later developments with regard to Mr. Fletcher's past, and then he

proceeded to explain briefly to Mr. Douglas that Mr. Fletcher could never have availed himself of Mr. Douglas' good intention to make use of him in a business way, as the police were after him for crimes only a little less serious than the one of which they knew.

Douglas did not seem inclined to believe it. "I liked that fellow," he said frankly. "He seemed to me to be the real stuff. I make my money sizing up the men I meet with and the yarns they spin to me. Any man may commit murder. We can't judge him until we know what drove him to it. But if that fellow Fletcher was a thief or a forger, I'll own up I never was so badly fooled in my life."

The doctor smiled. "You're not fooled on one thing, Mr. Douglas," he said, "Fletcher was smart enough not to be caught. At least he has only about ten hours more to stay hid, and you get your money all right. Your judgment was good enough to pick the winner in that little bet. Come up to Green's to-night at eight o'clock and I'll hand over the stakes. This is the day, you know."

"You don't catch me going near Green's," said Douglas, rather emphatically. "I should have a blue funk if I went in there again. I have never been able to forget that bloody

pocket-book, and that fellow Fletcher, pale as a ghost, backing out of the door with his watch in his hand, telling us not to move for twenty minutes. My! It gives me the shivers yet. I know I'll be like Maynard. Remember that yarn of his? Yes. I'll fall into the arms of the first cop that looks at me."

"But you must come to Green's to-night at eight, as agreed. Hartley will be there, and Mr. Groscup has promised to come up, as he is interested in the case. I have reserved the room."

"Not the same room, I hope?"

"Yes, the same room. Why not?"

"Can't stand it, my dear doctor. I should say or do something that would give the whole thing away, I know. I believe if I saw a spot on the table-cloth I'd shriek. Too much of Banquo's ghost about that place for me. Come up to my club, or some other restaurant. Anywhere but that room of Green's."

But the doctor insisted on Green's. That was the agreement, and even if he stayed only long enough to hear the clock strike eight and get Mr. Hartley's acknowledgment that Fletcher had not been found within the time specified, he must come. Finally, after both men had argued him into it, he agreed to be at Green's on time that evening.

CHAPTER XXXIII

UPON Hartley's return, which was on Friday, he had been in no hurry, apparently, to dispense with Johnson's services. He seemed rather anxious, however, to discover how much his confidential clerk had learned about the mission upon which Johnson had been originally engaged, and how much they had exchanged confidences.

The manner in which the ground seemed to have opened and swallowed Milton Fletcher was a never-ending source of wonder and comment with Hartley. How the police could have completely dropped that murder mystery, when it seemed to him that it should have been such a simple affair, if they had only exercised a little common sense, was another thing he never ceased talking about. At the same time, he was very glad that there was apparently no danger of his being drawn into the case now.

"Mr. Groscup says you will never hear anything more about it," McBride told him, "unless Maynard comes back, or makes a death-bed confession somewhere."

"Maynard come back! How can a dead man

come back? You mean Fletcher. Oh! Of course! Yes! I understand. You have got that theory from Johnson. Yes, yes!" and he laughed it off, adding quickly, so as to change the subject, "and how is Miss Ohlstrom?"

McBride's color changed instantly. "She is very well, thank you. Doesn't believe a word of it though."

"Doesn't believe a word of what?"

"Doesn't believe he's a forger, or a married man, or a dead man, or anything."

"Sticks to him, eh? Fine girl that. But you say he never wrote her a line? Never tried to see her, or anything?"

"I don't see how a dead man can do anything like that very well, sir."

"That's so! Of course not! Of course not! So he's dead, is he? What am I talking about? Johnson's theory, of course. Well, forget it." He got up and cut the end off a cigar. After a pause he asked:

"By the way. How comes it that you know so much about what Miss Ohlstrom believes, and how she is? Been here again, has she?"

McBride blushed. He might as well confess that he had met her accidentally at the Athletic Club reception and had been introduced to her;

had called on her once or twice and found her very agreeable.

"Why, then she must be a respectable girl!" exclaimed Hartley in evident astonishment.

"I wish you to understand, sir," replied McBride with some warmth, "that Miss Ohlstrom belongs to one of the best families in the city, and that I esteem it an honor to consider her a personal friend of mine."

"Then what on earth was she doing running with a professional forger?" Hartley answered testily.

"He presented forged letters of introduction to her father I believe."

"Then I advise you to tell her that the sooner she looks them up the better."

"She has done so, sir. She expects a letter by the mail that is due from England to-morrow. I see the boat is reported at Nantucket Shoals, and should be at Sandy Hook some time to-night. I am going to call on Miss Ohlstrom to-morrow afternoon, to learn the result of her letter of inquiry."

"Indeed! Well, just let me know how it comes out. I shan't come down to-morrow; but I have a dinner engagement at Green's at eight with Douglas and Ramie. If you learn anything of importance, you might drop in there and let

us know. We'll be there for an hour or two. If it turns out that he has presented forged letters of introduction, there should be no doubt about the rest of his record."

CHAPTER XXXIV

McBRIDE called upon Helen about four o'clock; but no letter had arrived from England. Her father had received some foreign mail by that boat earlier in the day, downtown, and she felt that there was no chance now. She was evidently very much depressed about it, and stood at the window looking at the gathering darkness, wiping off the window pane occasionally with that peculiar nervous movement which forebodes a fit of tears.

McBride had seen enough of that sort of thing, so he thought it best to take his leave and to promise to call later in the evening, as the last mail would not be delivered until after six o'clock. He was disappointed himself that the letter had not come, and he hoped it would arrive soon. He felt sure that when one prop fell, and Mr. Hardy Maxwell's heartless deception was exposed by the discovery of his forged letters, the whole fabric of the girl's infatuation would fall; and then, at last, his patience would be rewarded. He had not been able to keep his promise to find Maxwell for

her. But he could keep his vow to expose the Englishman.

Helen was standing at the window when he returned, and she flew to the door to let him in. What a change two hours had made! She was radiant. She was a picture. He had never seen her so beautiful before, as she rushed into the parlor and then turned and faced him, waving a letter in her hand.

"There!" she said, "I knew it! I knew it! Read that! No; I'll read it to you. No. You can read it yourself," forcing it into his hand. "Oh, I'm so glad that I never believed any of those horrid things," she said, as she stood facing him while he read, her hands clasped and trembling with excitement; her face half smiles and half tears.

It was a simple letter, which just filled four sides of the sheet, closely but neatly written in a girl's hand. It was from Miss Ohlstrom's cousin and read:

"DEAR HELEN—Mamma asks me to answer your letter, as she is not very well. We are so glad you like Hardy Maxwell. We got a long letter from him about a week before yours came. He said some awfully nice things about you; in fact mamma thinks he must have *inten-*

tions. But I suppose you know all about that. I think he would be a perfectly splendid lover, so tall and handsome.

Papa was a little worried because Hardy wrote that he had resigned his position in England; but he said he had something more promising on hand in America, and that he wanted to stay there for *other* reasons. We could *almost guess* what the *other* reasons were, after what he said about you. You know he was chief of the foreign service at Scotland Yard, and the inspector told papa he was the most promising man they had, and would be made an inspector when he got back. He went to America after some bank robbers or something, and he was very lucky. I think papa said the chief of the robbers happened to be on the same ship, and Hardy got put in the same cabin with him, and the captain was very kind, and took the robber's bag into the captain's room on the last day, so that Hardy could get it afterwards, and he found all the robber's papers and things in it. A Mrs. Stewart, that papa says is the cleverest woman detective in the world, was with Hardy, and she got the robber to make love to her, or something. Papa says she and Hardy managed things so cleverly that they can arrest all the robbers any minute, and a man is going over

this week to bring them back; but I suppose Hardy has told you all about it himself.

Give Hardy much love and tell him to write often.

Your affectionate cousin,

AGNES."

McBride was speechless. His first thought was of Johnson and his theory of the disappearance. Could it be possible that some of the gang had waylaid Hardy Maxwell and finding Maynard with him and in the way, had killed them both? That would account for the disappearance of the two men. He had not the heart to throw a cloud over the happy face before him just then. If that were the solution of the tragedy in the cab, it would come to light in time. But after reading that letter he could see no earthly reason why Hardy Maxwell should not have written at least a line, unless it were true that he was lying at the bottom of the river.

"*Now* what have you got to say?" demanded Helen, smiling radiantly, taking the letter from him and holding it tightly in both hands as if to be sure that it was real.

"I am sure I do not know what to say," McBride faltered, beginning to feel sick at

heart and discouraged at the turn things had taken, "unless it is to go and tell the police to look for a detective named Maxwell. I suppose you still hold me to my promise to find him for you, no matter what his name is?"

"Now don't be disagreeable," she admonished, "but tell me what you think best to be done. Some one must know where he is. Perhaps detectives do not give their real names to the police. Suppose you ask them if there is an English detective in town, and where he is?"

McBride could not help smiling at the simplicity of the suggestion, but at the same time he was turning over in his mind several possibilities that might be clues. Prominent among them was the fact that Mr. Hartley was to be at Green's that night with Douglas and Dr. Ramie, and the business on hand was undoubtedly the settlement of that little wager with Mr. Douglas. Mr. Maxwell was the object of that wager.

As soon as he explained the situation to Helen she felt intuitively that in some way or other they would have news of Hardy Maxwell, and she was seized with a feverish anxiety to learn what took place at that dinner. She could not wait until next day. Something within her, one of those curious presentiments that we all have

sometimes, seemed to urge her, some voice seemed to tell her, to be as near that dinner as she could get. She could feel herself drawn towards it like a magnet.

She asked McBride where the dinner at which he was to see Mr. Hartley was to be, and when he told her, it flashed across her mind that there was a theatre just round the corner and a play that she had wished to see. What if Mr. McBride could be persuaded to take her to that theatre, and bring her the news from the dinner?

It would be dreadfully unconventional for her to go to a theatre with him without a chaperon, but she had done so many unconventional things lately in her anxiety to get some news of Hardy—going to men's business offices, meeting young men she did not know at athletic clubs, and all that sort of thing, that one more did not matter.

"Do you know what I should like to do?" she began, looking at McBride archly. "I should like to go somewhere." As she stopped and looked up at him hesitatingly, he felt that he would be willing to take her anywhere on earth, if only to be with her during the journey.

"Well! I should like to go somewhere where it is all life and gaiety, and where I could laugh and cry and no one would notice me. I should

like to go to the theatre and see a play. Some play where the lovers have a dreadful time, you know, but everything comes out right in the end. Only I'm afraid I should shout out to the heroine not to be discouraged, and not to pay any attention to what people told her. I'm sure I should do something silly, and I know I should cry when it turned out all right."

"I am sorry to say I do not know of any such play," he remarked, without any particular show of enthusiasm.

"But I do," she said, enthusiastically, naming the theatre.

"Why, that is right round the corner from Green's!" he exclaimed. "I promised to take Mr. Hartley a message at Green's, some time between eight and ten. Would you really go with me? Shall I see if I can get tickets?" he inquired eagerly.

"Oh please do! I will be very nice to you to-night, you know; you have been so kind to me. Oh, won't it be jolly!" and she fairly skipped along the floor to the piano. "I will be ready in half an hour. Don't mind dressing for the evening, and I won't either. You look very nice in that black suit." A handshake, a smile, another glance at her letter, and she ran upstairs.

CHAPTER XXXV

THREE men assembled at Green's about a quarter to eight, and went into the private room in which two of them had dined together more than a month before. The three were Dr. Ramie, Frank Douglas, and Mr. Groscup. Hartley had not appeared yet. The table was already set, with pretty red shades over the candles and button-hole bouquets at each plate.

"Good old New York!" exclaimed Douglas, as his eye caught sight of the cocktails standing by the plates, for one of which he promptly reached. "Nothing like this abroad, you know. Nothing but beastly cold rooms, with shocking draughts everywhere, and all the people yapping about fresh air and coughing their heads off at the same time. Nothing like this outside little old New York," holding the cocktail up to the light, and then draining it at a gulp. "Tell the waiter to fill that up again. The temptation was too much for my manners, boys."

A moment later Hartley burst into the room, trembling with excitement. He did not even say good-evening; and although Douglas greeted

him cordially and extended his hand, he took it as if he did not see it. He did not even take off his hat.

"What's the matter now?" demanded the doctor, astonished at his manner.

"Read that, will you?" Hartley exclaimed, pulling out the latest edition of the afternoon paper, and slamming the door behind him. "Caught him; on my word! At the eleventh hour. Caught the whole gang. Here it is in the extra, just out."

Groscup took the paper and found that the scare headlines announced the capture of the whole Ardmore gang, and all their paraphernalia. There were no particulars, except that the leader was arrested in New York, and three others in Philadelphia and Boston. All the arrests had been made almost simultaneously with the arrival of officers from England with extradition warrants.

"What's that got to do with us?" asked Douglas bluntly.

"Do with us? Why your man Fletcher is Ardmore. Didn't you know that?"

The other men laughed.

"Say, you're getting nutty, Hartley," remarked Douglas. "Sit down and compose yourself." Groscup approached Hartley and gave

him a nudge, whispering in his ear, "You forget that these gentlemen did not employ Johnson."

The hint had an immediate and subduing effect on Hartley, who cast about for something to distract their attention from him, as he saw they were evidently astonished at his conduct.

"What are all these places set for?" he demanded. "Only four of us, and a table set for six."

"We took the room as it was," explained the doctor, "and as the table is large, I suppose they thought it would look better to dress it as usual."

"Here, waiter," shouted Douglas to a waiter who had just entered with some plates, which he was placing on the side table. "Bring in two more cocktails. I drank two of these already."

"That fellow's no waiter," remarked Hartley. "He's only an omnibus. Wait until George comes." Nevertheless, the man disappeared and brought in two more cocktails, and then stood with his napkin over his arm, as if waiting to receive any further orders.

"Are *you* going to wait on us?" demanded Hartley, rather sharply. The waiter bowed. "Then you are a full-fledged waiter now, eh?" The waiter smiled.

"I think ze gentlemen will be pleased with me," he said, showing his teeth and bowing again.

"Well, we're all here," observed Douglas. "Let's start in. Five minutes to eight now. Got that check with you, doc?" The doctor said he guessed he had everything with him, and the four men sat down.

"Let's clear some of these things off," said Hartley. "What's the use of having all this stuff on the table?"

"It looks nice, I think," said Dr. Ramie quietly, "but the waiter can remove them if you like." Then, turning round, he said, "You can bring up the soup now, John," upon which the waiter disappeared, closing the door softly behind him.

Hartley sat facing this door, and as soon as he saw it shut he observed: "That fellow was no good a couple of weeks ago when we were in here. Surprising how quick they learn. Great country for—— Holy smoke! What's that?"

Hartley had started from his seat with his eyes fixed on the slowly opening door. A look of absolute terror was on his face. The others instantly followed his gaze and beheld a tall man with a grey mustache, who stood just with-

in the door and greeted them with a nervous little laugh. Douglas gave a jump that shook everything on the table, while the doctor simply gripped the back of his chair. Groscup alone remained unmoved until Douglas found his voice.

"Paul Maynard! By all that's good and holy!"

The new arrival advanced into the room with his hand extended. "Just in time I see," he said. "How do, Douglas? Hello, Hartley." As the two men stood there, their mouths open, their hands trembling with fright, Maynard turned to Dr. Ramie. "A friend of yours, doctor?" he said, nodding toward the lawyer. "May I have the pleasure?"

After the introduction, which Groscup seemed to look upon as some unexplained joke, Maynard sat down at one of the vacant places at the table and tried to appear at ease, although it was evident that he was very nervous. The silence for a minute was painful.

"Nothing wrong, I hope?" he asked, looking round at them all and tossing off a cocktail.

Hartley and Douglas finally summoned courage enough to sit down again, still staring at the unexpected guest. Hartley was the first to recover himself.

"So you're alive, eh? Lost your money but saved your life."

"How about that ring?" blurted Douglas, assured that he was not talking to a ghost.

"You will have to ask some one else about that, my dear fellow," said Maynard, with the same nervous little laugh. He had evidently not quite recovered his equanimity, in spite of his efforts to control himself.

"But where on earth have you been, and what happened to you?"

"Why, my dear fellow, I've been down in the West Indies. Had to take a boat home that got here on Thursday, so as to be in time for to-night, you know. So I ran down to Atlantic City until this afternoon. New York is just the same old place, I see." And then he gave another nervous little laugh.

"But what about Fletcher, and the cab, and the——" Hartley stopped suddenly, and winked at the others as the waiter entered the room. When the waiter had disappeared again, Hartley repeated his question, adding, "And the stolen pocket-book?"

"Why, you see, the fact is, there was some delay in getting started. And then Fletcher had some explanations to make in the cab before proceeding. As these were perfectly satis-

factory, I gave him the pocket-book, and we went on to the dock where the cab was found. I supposed he would bring the pocket-book here, as agreed."

"So he did," remarked the doctor. "I have it in my pocket now."

"But the body in the river, and the blood in the cab, and all that?" demanded Douglas, almost below his breath.

"That was all a put-up job, my dear fellow. You see Fletcher had an idea that perhaps some one might give the thing away to the police." Hartley turned a shade paler, and toyed nervously with his fork. "But he said that if it looked like a murder, no matter what financial interest any one might have in the result, he would probably keep his mouth shut after he had consulted a lawyer."

"Egad! That fits me!" remarked Douglas, "Eh, old man?" slapping Groscup on the back. Hartley was gradually becoming livid, and was conscious that the doctor's eye was upon him. He could not trust himself to speak.

"Most interesting," remarked Groscup. "But may I ask, Mr. Maynard, how the cab came to be all bloody, and how the body came to be found in the river at that precise spot?"

"We had the blood with us in a demijohn,

and as for the body, I believe there were only parts of a body. We threw them in the river after we had soaked the cab."

"Yes, egad!" exclaimed Douglas, interrupting. "And that reminds me of something that I have lain awake nights thinking about. Who drove that cab? Why could not the police find him, even if they didn't catch any one else?"

Maynard gave another little laugh. "The driver supplied the demijohn and the limbs, I believe," and he looked hard at Dr. Ramie, who was turning very red in the face as he found every one at the table gazing at him.

"I may as well own up, gentlemen," said the doctor, smiling, "I drove the cab."

Groscup relieved the situation by bursting into a loud laugh, and before any one could say another word the waiter entered the room with the fish. When he disappeared again, the doctor resumed:

"Yes, I stole the cab from in front of my own door, after a confederate had coaxed the driver inside to have a drink. It cost me fifty to fix that up with the stable; but when I collect that hundred from Hartley, I shall still be fifty ahead. I changed the number on the lamps, as directed by my confederate, and just there I made a big slip, which I thought at one time

would spoil the whole thing. The detectives said the numbers were changed with a mixture of liquid glue and ink. If they had examined it carefully they would have found it was collodion and ink, and they would have known that it was a doctor that had done it. By tracing the cab to the house in front of which it was stolen, they would have had me dead to rights, especially as I still had some of the mixture on the mantel. But the smartest detectives sometimes overlook important clues."

"Of course they do," interrupted Douglas. "That's what I was betting on."

"By a fortunate chance," continued the doctor, "we had an amputation that afternoon at the hospital. Arm and leg run over close to the hip and shoulder. After taking off the limbs, I had an idea, and I just hacked off the injured parts and put the rest in a bag. These went into the cab with the demijohn. That was human blood in the cab, all right."

"But I can't understand why no one recognized that ring," persisted Douglas.

"No one had seen it for twenty years but you and Maynard. It was knocking around in a drawer in my office ever since I can remember. Fletcher saw it, and it was Fletcher's suggestion that Maynard should put it on and

call your attention to it that night at dinner. Then he gave it to me, and I put it on the arm we threw in the river. He did that to be sure that you would think it was Maynard that was murdered, and keep mum about it."

"We kept mum, all right. Eh, Groscup?" laughed Douglas, slapping the lawyer on the back again.

Groscup smiled, and looked at Hartley, who was very quiet. "This is very interesting, gentlemen," he remarked, "but as a lawyer it seems to me that the kernel of the matter has not yet been touched upon. Where is Fletcher himself?"

"That is a question I am unable to answer," said Maynard, with another nervous little laugh. "He did not make a confidant of me. Perhaps the doctor knows. He was with Fletcher most of the time we were hatching up our little scheme."

"Give you my word of honor, gentlemen; I haven't seen him nor heard of him since the moment he went out of this room after handing me that pocket-book."

"You'll find him in the station-house tomorrow morning," said Hartley, dryly. "They've caught the whole gang. Since you fellows are all making a clean breast of it, I

may as well tell you what I know. Fletcher was——" The waiter appearing at the door with a tray full of dishes, Hartley thought it best to wait until he had gone out again. "Waiters will talk," he remarked.

"It's nearly half past eight, and I claim the stakes," observed Douglas, regardless of the presence of the waiter.

"Not on your life," snapped Hartley. "If they have that gang in jail, he's among them; and they were arrested before eight o'clock; so I win."

"What have we to do with any 'gang'?" asked the doctor, quietly. Hartley nodded toward the waiter, as if to warn the doctor not to talk in his presence. "Go on. Don't mind him," said Dr. Ramie. "What have we to do with that gang?"

"Why, Fletcher's one of the Ardmore gang. I may as well tell you, since you insist on it. He called himself Fletcher, and Walton, and Maxwell, and all sorts of names. He's one of the slickest forgers on earth. You will never see Maynard's five thousand dollars again; you can bet on that. But you will find Fletcher in the calaboose to-morrow morning."

"My five thousand dollars!" exclaimed Maynard. "What are you talking about?"

"Didn't he take five thousand dollars from you in that pocket-book?"

Maynard lay back and laughed. The doctor joined him.

"Shall I serve ze salad now, gentlemen?" demanded the waiter, impassively.

"Yes. Serve anything you like," snapped Hartley. "Bring in two more bottles first."

"I confess that I think Mr. Douglas is right," remarked the doctor, as he helped the waiter to lift the salad bowl. "We have nothing to do with any Ardmore gang. As it is now more than half-past the hour, I shall hand over the stakes."

"If Fletcher is among that gang that was arrested this afternoon, I will hold you responsible," shouted Hartley, shaking his finger at the doctor. Then he sat back and looked hot and uncomfortable.

"You shall have your money if he was caught before eight o'clock this evening," said Douglas reassuringly. "In the meantime, doctor, I should like to feel the feel of that little check, if you please."

The doctor pulled out the red leather pocket-book and took from it the two checks. One was the original given him by Douglas; the other was Hartley's.

"Just endorse that to my order, please," said Douglas, pushing the check back toward Dr. Ramie after he had examined it. "I see it's payable to you."

The waiter, who was right behind Douglas, picked up the check and handed it to the doctor, stooping toward him at the same time, and saying loud enough for them all to hear: "I should much prefer it if you would endorse that check to me, according to agreement."

Every man at the table started at the sudden change in the waiter's voice and manner. Even Groscup had his mouth wide open. Again Douglas was the first to recognize the intruder.

"Milton Fletcher! As I'm a living sinner!" he shouted, jumping out of his chair. "Give me your hand, Fletcher. Ardmore gang, eh? Rats! What a lark! What a police force! Say, Hartley, you're easy. This is too good."

After the first outburst of surprise had subsided, the erstwhile waiter took it very calmly. He begged to be allowed to go and explain matters to the proprietor, who came back with him, and laughed at the gentlemen's little practical joke; but reproved them for depriving him of a very promising waiter.

"Now tell us where you have been all this

time, Fletcher," demanded the doctor, when order was restored.

"I have never been out of this house since I handed you that pocket-book. I went down to the wash-room and shaved off my beard and mustache. Coming up again, the proprietor was standing at the top of the stairs, and I could not very well pass him at that time of the morning without saying something. As I could not think of anything else at the moment, I asked him if he wanted any waiters. To my surprise he looked me over, said some complimentary things about my appearance, and we struck a bargain at once. I have not been outside the door since."

"Why you rascal," said the doctor, "you were in this room about three weeks ago when we were here with Mr. Groscup?"

"Yes, and I saw that you did not recognize me."

CHAPTER XXXVI

A GENTLE knock at the door, and a new waiter appeared, to say that there was a gentleman to speak to Mr. Hartley. It was McBride. He had excused himself at the end of the first act, telling Helen that he would return almost as soon as the curtain went up, but that he must take an important message to Mr. Hartley.

Hartley introduced him with a simple wave of the hand, a sort of inclusive introduction. "Gentlemen," he said, "this is my confidential man, Mr. James McBride. On Monday, he will be a junior partner," slapping him on the back, as he noted the blush that rose to the newcomer's cheeks.

"That letter, sir," the young man whispered.

"Oh, hang the letter. That's all over with." Noticing the evident look of astonishment on the young man's face, he continued: "You know the doctor and Mr. Groscup, and Mr. Douglas. This gentleman," pointing to Maynard, "is the man that Johnson said killed some one." Maynard stood up and smilingly shook hands with McBride, who was staring at him blankly.

"And now shake hands with the man Johnson said he killed," continued Hartley, evidently enjoying his little joke. "This is Mr. Walton, or Mr. Fletcher, or Mr. Maxwell or some other old name——"

"Hardy Maxwell is correct," said the erstwhile waiter, standing up and shaking hands with the stupefied McBride, who seemed actually to shrink from him.

"Sit right down, James, and join us," said Hartley, "we're going to make a night of it, even if I have lost the biggest bet I ever made. You shall be a junior partner on Monday. That's no joke, my boy."

"Look here. I'm not going to be outdone in the junior partnership business," interrupted Douglas. "That is, not if Mr. Fletcher—I beg pardon, Maxwell, did you say?—is agreeable. You have ten thousand dollars capital to start with, you know," he added, smiling at Hardy.

"I should be delighted," was all Maxwell could say, his face all smiles, "provided you will teach me the business."

The doctor rapped for order.

"There is still one thing to be cleared up," he said, looking at Maxwell. "Why all these false names?"

"I can explain that, gentlemen," remarked

McBride quietly, disregarding the warning finger that Hartley gave him, although Hartley himself did not know what was coming. "Before Mr. Maxwell resigned his position to carry out this little joke, for I see that is what it must have been, he was one of the leading detectives in Scotland Yard. To him and to Mrs. Stewart, whom some of you gentlemen have met"—this with a wicked smile at Hartley and Groscup, both of whom looked guilty—"and who is one of the smartest women detectives in the world, is due the credit of arresting the Ardmore gang."

Groscup wanted to get under the table. Hartley took a big drink before he ventured to remark, aside:

"That's another thing that Johnson got upside down. He got the police and the Ardmore gang as badly mixed as the victim and the murderer, it seems."

"That is about as close as private detectives usually come to it," remarked the lawyer, feeling rather silly at the recollection of his examination of Mrs. Stewart at the café.

Hartley again urged McBride to sit down. "I can't; I am at the theatre round the corner with a friend," McBride explained. "But I

should like to speak a word to Mr. Maxwell before I go."

The two men went into the hall together, and when Maxwell returned to the room, he looked decidedly pleased about something.

"I am ahead of all you fellows in one thing, I know," said Hartley. "Fill up your glasses and I'll give you a toast. We will all drink to Miss Ohlstrom. Stand up now, and every glass goes over the shoulder empty."

"I'll not only drink to that; but I'll have a guess at what it means, and I'll promise to furnish the house for a wedding present. Am I right?" laughed Douglas.

"I should like to make a few remarks," said Groscup, after they had done the honors to that toast, still standing. "I have had occasion to speak to both my clients here about the evil results that sometimes arise from after-dinner episodes. But this one seems to have been a happy exception. Here we have two young men considerably advanced in their business prospects."

"And a nice fat fee earned by the lawyer," interrupted the doctor with a laugh.

"And a doctor getting fifty dollars for stealing a cab," retorted the lawyer, bowing.

"And two private detectives working a great

snap for a month. But that's my affair," put in Hartley.

"Now gentlemen," continued the lawyer, filling up his glass, and motioning the others to do likewise, "I want this little after-dinner joke to have a still more happy outcome——"

"We've had that toast," interrupted Hartley.

"I wish, gentlemen," continued the lawyer, ignoring the remark, "that one of the results of this little affair may be that we shall see Mr. Hartley and Mr. Douglas bury the hatchet, and be the best of friends in future."

Douglas set down his glass and extended his hand to Hartley, who, after a moment's hesitation, grasped it warmly. "Hartley, old man," he said, "let's pull together instead of apart, and you'll catch up that ten thousand inside thirty days."

Then they all sang "He's a jolly good fellow," and got very merry. Douglas announced that he wished to say a word for the police.

"They never had a chance in this case," he remarked. "They didn't know what they were looking for, let alone where to look for it. Let us drink to their better success in more important cases."

A few minutes before eleven, Maxwell, who was evidently watching the time nervously,

begged to be excused. He had an engagement which he must keep. He hoped to see them all there as his guests the following Saturday night.

"Good-by and good luck," they shouted in chorus, as he went out. "Don't get pinched," was Douglas' parting sally as the door closed.

CHAPTER XXXVII

MR. McBRIDE returned to his seat in the theatre looking very grave. In spite of his efforts, he could not respond to his companion's gay spirits, although he tried to smile when she looked at him. She laughed at the by-play of the already married couple in the piece. She cried at the lovers' parting, and she waved her handkerchief madly at the happy ending. It was perfectly lovely, she declared, although she was inwardly bitterly disappointed that McBride had brought no news from the dinner.

McBride had been consulting his watch very often toward the end. They were among the last to leave the theatre, and when they were near the door, he said he had left his opera glasses on the seat. He begged her to wait a moment while he recovered them. He seemed to be a long time finding out that they were in his pocket all the time, and the attendants were beginning to turn out the lights.

When they reached the side lobby, it was empty, except for a tall young man who stood

there, peering out into the night through the glass doors.

"I think that is our carriage outside," remarked McBride, stopping to adjust his coat. She noticed he was very pale.

"Yes, that is our carriage," he repeated nervously, and so loudly that the remark seemed intended for someone else. Then, extending his hand to her as he removed his hat, he added quietly, his voice choking with suppressed emotion:

"I have had a delightful evening, Miss Ohlstrom. Might I offer to repay—in some slight measure—the pleasure you have given me?"

He stopped short. She could not help seeing the unmistakable sob that was choking him. He gripped her hand hard as he went on:

"I have—kept my promise—to you. I have found him for you," motioning toward the tall young man who was now stepping hastily toward them. "*He* will see you home."

As he released her hand and plunged through the door into the darkness outside, she turned, with a startled look, to the tall young man with the black hair, who was holding his hat in his left hand and extending his right with a smile.

"Don't you know me, Helen?" he said. "This is Hardy." And the next moment she

was in his arms, hardly knowing whether to laugh or cry.

A minute later they were in the carriage, rolling down the Great White Way toward the Bridge.

"Now," she said decisively, "you shan't kiss me any more until you give a full account of yourself. "Where on earth have you been all this time?"

"In New York. But that is too long a story to tell you now. I stayed here so that you should not have to come to me. The bridegroom has come for his bride, as you wished it to be."

THE END

MAR 29 1937